

# JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE

CLARENCE YOUNG





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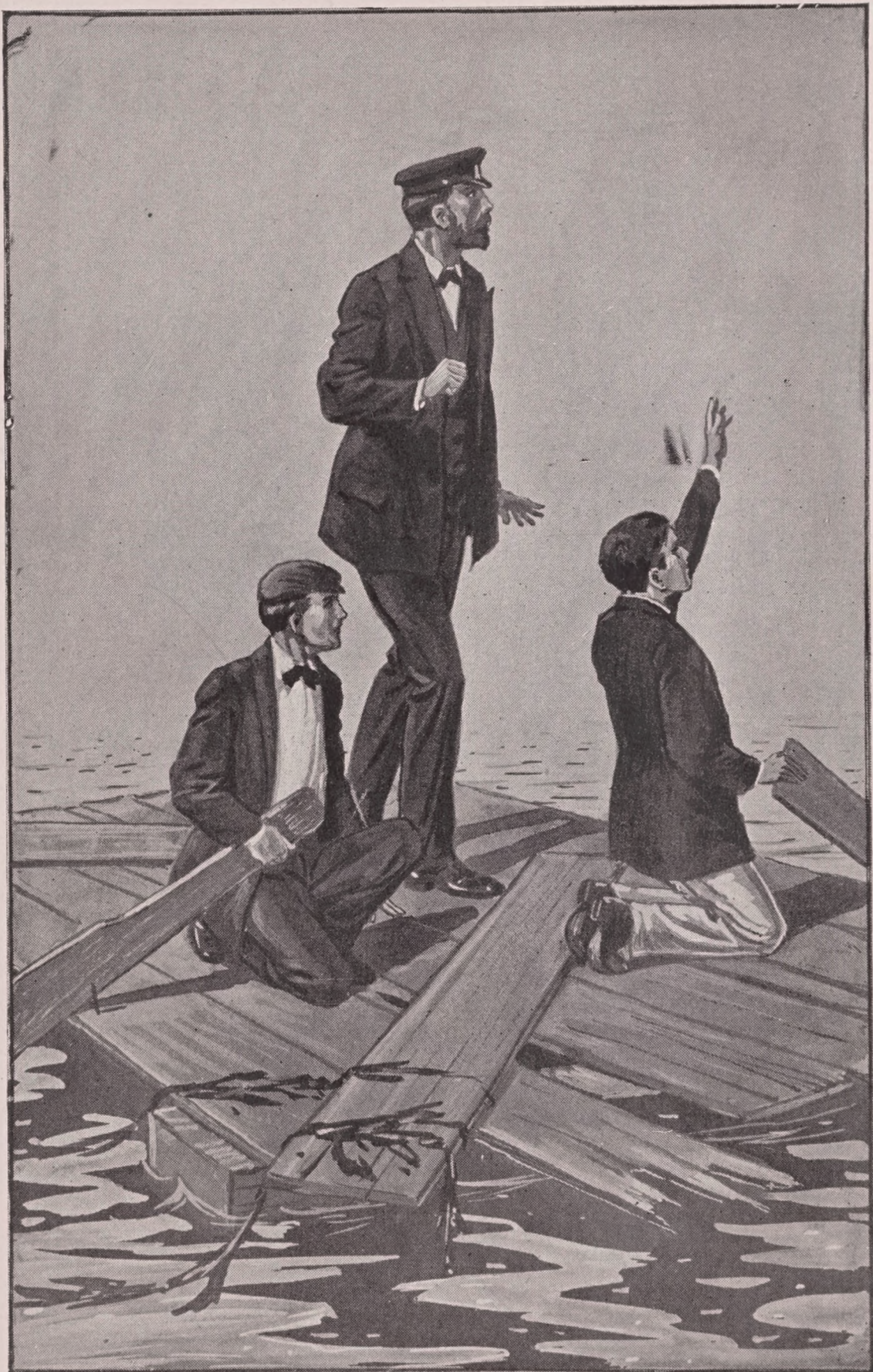












"Off to the left sounded a cry"



# JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE

Or

The Wreck of the Polly Ann

BY

CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF "JACK RANGER'S SCHOOLDAYS," "JACK RANGER'S  
WESTERN TRIP," "JACK RANGER'S SCHOOL VICTORIES,"  
"THE MOTOR BOYS," "THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND,"  
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JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE

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# JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE

## CHAPTER I

### THE WASH-BOILER SERENADE

"COME on, Nat; aren't you going down to the depot to meet Sam and Bony?"

"Depot? Of course. Gasolene gondolas! but you don't want to go down so soon; do you? Why, it's an hour till train time. Unless there's something up?" finished Nat Anderson, looking with a critical eye at his chum, Jack Ranger. "Eh, Jack? Something doing? Go on, now; don't raise my youthful hopes on high, only to dash them to earth again."

"Say, you're getting poetical all of a sudden, Nat."

"Poetical? So would you if you felt as I do. Think of it! Two months with nothing to do but have fun!"

"Then you're not going to do any studying this vacation, and work off your conditions?"

"Cæsar's cyclometer, no! I'm going to have



all the fun I can before we go back to Washington Hall. But say, what's up? There must be something, or you wouldn't come for me to go to the station an hour before train time."

"Well, I don't mind admitting that I have a little plan in mind," remarked Jack slowly, looking, meanwhile, as solemn as a judge.

"Why didn't you come sooner, then?" asked Nat reproachfully. "Tantalizing terrapins! If you're getting up some scheme we'll want all the time possible to work it out."

"Say, Nat," spoke Jack, "if you've any more of those in your system, you'd better get them out before we start."

"Any more what?"

"Why, such expressions as 'rollicking bean poles' or 'slab-sided sauer-kraut.' I don't want to take you down to the station with them in you."

"Why not?"

"They might fall on the track, and derail the train."

"I guess I'm done," said Nat meekly, for sometimes his odd expressions slipped out before he knew it. "I say, though, do you care if I use that one, once in awhile?"

"Which one?"

"'Slab-sided sauer-kraut.' It's a dandy."



"No, you can have it. I haven't a patent on it. But come on, if you're going."

"Of course I'm going, but you haven't told me what the game is yet."

"I'll tell you. We're going to receive Sam and Bony in proper style. I've told Pete Ruggles and Aleck Dawes, and they'll help out."

"Help out what?"

"Why, the wash-boiler serenade, of course."

"Say, you're as bad as I am. What's a wash-boiler serenade? 'Tinkling tin-pots.' You're as mysterious as Marinello Booghoobally, *alias* Hemp Smith, used to be."

"He only pretended to be mysterious. There's no mystery about what I'm going to do. You know Sam Chalmers and Bony Balmore are coming to pay me a visit."

"Sure. I knew that last week, when you told me they had accepted your invite. But what about the serenade?"

"I'm coming to that."

"So's Fourth of July — next year. Get a little more gasoline on. Throw in the high-speed gear, and advance your spark a bit."

"Well, there isn't much to it. You know Doo-ley's five and ten cent store?"

"I should say so, where you can buy anything



from a pair of glasses to a cake of soap for ten cents."

"That's the place. Well, they're having a special sale of tin wash boilers to-day. Everybody in town is buying one, to judge by the way people are going through the streets carrying them. I got the idea from seeing them. We'll each go buy one, take 'em down to the depot, and, when Sam and Bony come in, we'll serenade 'em."

"That's the stuff! I'm with you. We'll give 'em the rogues' march from Tannhauser."

"There's no rogues' march in that."

"Oh, well, they'll never know the difference. Where are Pete and Aleck going to meet you?"

"In front of the store. Dooley sells only one boiler to a customer, so we each have to go there and buy one. There's a big crowd in front of the place, but I guess we can get in. The boilers are a big bargain, and Dooley is selling them for ten cents only to draw trade. Now come on, before they're all sold out."

The two lads started from Nat's house, where Jack had stopped to call for his chum, and hastened down the main business street of the little town of Denton.

"There's Pete!" exclaimed Jack, as they came in sight of quite a throng of people in front of



the store, where a great variety of articles could be purchased for a dime, or half that sum.

"Yes, and Aleck's with him," added Nat. "Limping lollypops! but there's quite a gang there. We'll never get in, Jack."

"You just follow your uncle," advised Jack. "We'll get in all right."

"If we do we'll never get out," went on Nat, as he drew closer and observed what a crush there was of persons anxious to get a twenty-five-cent boiler for ten cents.

"Getting out will be the easiest part of it," replied Jack. "Come on."

"Thought you fellers were never coming," grumbled Pete, as he greeted Nat and Jack.

"It was Nat's fault," replied Jack. "He had to stop and argue the thing."

"I did not! You took all day telling what was up," retorted Nat.

"Well, stop arguing and come on in," suggested Aleck. "Say, but there's quite a push, Jack."

"Yes, and we'll have to push to get in. Here, each of you take a dime, and then you won't have to wait for change. Now come on. Follow me."

"Yes, fellow soldiers, doomed to die in the



cause of fun, follow our noble leader!" declaimed Nat in a low, hoarse whisper, which set Aleck to giggling, a habit that he was prone to, and which, once started, was hard to stop.

"Now you've got him going!" exclaimed Pete reproachfully. "He'll not be able to stand up pretty soon."

In fact, Aleck was now doubled up in silent mirth. It did not take much to start him, and still less to keep him going.

"Oh! oh!" he gasped. "I can't stop!"

"Quit that and come on in," urged Pete. "They'll all be gone."

"I — ca-can't!" stammered Aleck, getting his breath, and starting off on another spasm. "Nat's voice sounded so funny, and when I think of what we're going to do —"

"I'll give you something else to think of," exclaimed Jack. "What you need is a counter-irritant," and he pinched Aleck vigorously on his leg.

"Ow! Ouch! Wow!" exclaimed the pinched one.

"That's right! Change your tune. Put a new record in," suggested Nat, and this nearly set Aleck off in another giggling fit. Only for the fact that a policeman, sent to keep the crowd in order,



moved around to see what the disturbance was in the neighborhood of where the boys stood, he might have had a worse hysterical fit of laughing. But he did not want Jack's plans spoiled, and managed to gain control of himself, so that the officer had nothing with which to find fault.

A few seconds later, after much pushing and shoving, the boys found themselves inside the store. It was quite a task to get to the counter where a corps of clerks were handing out the wash boilers, and each of the four lads finally managed to get one of the big tin affairs, though, during the operation a fat woman stuck her elbow into Aleck's ribs, and set him to giggling again. He was only stopped when Nat suddenly put his wash boiler over the afflicted youth's head.

"Say, that's a good idea!" exclaimed Jack. "Use 'em for helmets. We can get out easier then. I was going down through the cellar and out that way, but this is better. 'Tention, company.' Put on — wash boilers!"

At the command of their leader the other two lads raised the tin things above their heads and lowered them down, completely hiding their faces from view.

There was a laugh in the crowd about them, and one of the managers of the store came up.



"Here, you boys will have to leave at once," he said.

"We're not trees, but we'll leave," replied Jack.

"Forward — march!" exclaimed Nat, in hollow tones from beneath his helmet of bright tin.

A peculiar wiggling and shaking motion of Aleck's boiler indicated that the youth under it was beginning another spasm of laughing. The boiler was rattling away, as it vibrated back and forth on the buttons of his coat. The crowd about the counter began to laugh loudly.

"Come, now, get out of here," ordered the manager.

"We're going," replied Jack, and he began to move forward. The boiler acted like a snow plow, and, though Jack could only guess where he was going, so effective was the tin buffer, that a lane was opened for him through the crowd, and he marched out of the store, followed by his three chums. The people made way for them, as soon as they felt the touch of the boilers against them, and the lads were soon on the sidewalk.

"Unmask!" cried Jack, and they lifted off the boilers.

"Whew! It was hot under there!" exclaimed Nat. "Now what, Jack."

"Parade — rest," ordered the commander.



“We’ve got plenty of time yet, and I want to get some drumsticks.”

The boys turned down a side street, where there were few persons, and sat down on the wash boilers, which made very good seats.

“What time is the train due?” asked Aleck.

“Three thirty-seven, but it’s only ten minutes past. We’ll go down to the big willow tree and cut some sticks. Then we’ll go to the depot.”

The lads, after a brief rest, followed Jack down to the banks of a little brook, where grew a big willow tree, that served for the manufacture of innumerable whistles in the spring. Each youth cut two drumsticks and then, as train time was approaching, they wended their way to the Denton station.

“Let’s practice a bit,” suggested Nat, just before reaching the depot. “Start her up, Jack.”

Thereupon Jack, producing some strong cord, proceeded to tie his boiler about his neck, where it looked like an oddly shaped base drum. Then he beat a lusty tattoo, which was joined in by the other lads, who suspended their boilers as they completed their march to the station.

“Good land! I thought it was one of them Indian medicine shows comin’ along!” exclaimed the station agent. “What in the name of Gilli-



gan's roundhouse are you boys up to now, Jack Ranger? "

" This? Why, this is the first division of the Denton Town Band," replied Jack. " The other sections will be along later. Parade — rest! Stack boilers! " he commanded, and his little company came to a halt.

" What time is the three thirty-seven due? " asked Nat innocently.

" It's due at — why, you know what time it's due at," replied the agent, just saving himself from answering Nat's obvious question.

" What time'll it get here? " inquired Pete.

" It's half an hour late," was the answer. " There's a freight wreck up the line. Why, expectin' company? "

" Some friends," replied Jack.

" Heaven help your friends! " exclaimed the agent to himself, as he went into his office, and closed the door. " Them boys is up to some mischief, I'll wager a pad of telegraph blanks," he went on. " There's always something doing when Jack Ranger's around. Well, he don't mean any harm, I suppose, but just the same I'll stay inside."

As for Jack and his friends, they selected a shady spot to rest, for it was a hot July day, and warmer down at the depot than any other place in town.



"We've got quite a wait," remarked Jack. "I guess we've got time enough to go get a —"

But he did not finish the sentence. Instead he arose from his seat on the overturned wash boiler, and stood looking at two youths who were slowly walking down the depot platform.

"What's up?" asked Nat languidly, as he turned to see why Jack had ceased speaking. Then he, too, arose, and stood staring at the newcomers.

"There's Jerry Chowden!" exclaimed Jack in a low voice.

"Yes, and that sneak Tom Adams is with him," added Nat. "Now look out for squalls. I wonder what they're doing here?"

At that moment Jerry Chowden, the former bully of Washington Hall, and Jack Ranger's enemy, approached. He had seen the four lads, and an angry look came over his face.



## CHAPTER II

### THE QUARREL

APPROACHING quite close to Jack, the former bully of the school stood looking our hero over, with a sneering smile on his unpleasant face. On his part Jack calmly regarded his old enemy.

"So this is where he hangs out; is it?" asked Tom Adams of his crony.

"Yes, he bums around the depot most of the time, I suppose," went on Jerry. "This is the first good chance I've had to get even with him, for having me expelled, and I guess I've got time to take it out of him before our train comes along; eh, Tom?"

"Sure. Go ahead and lick him. I'll be on hand if you want any help."

"Are you speaking to me, or about me?" asked Jack in cool tones, as he stepped a few paces forward and confronted Jerry. "If you're speaking to me I wish you to understand that I don't care to have anything to do with you."

"Oh, my! We're getting very particular all of a sudden," put in Tom, with an affected laugh.



Jack never turned his head to look at the speaker.

"If you are speaking about me," went on Jack Ranger, "I wish you to understand that I don't take such sort of talk from any one, least of all, you, Chowden. You'll apologize or take the consequences!"

"Apologize? What for?" asked the bully, for, though he was larger and stronger than Jack, he knew he could not get the best of our hero in a fair fight.

"Apologize for saying that I 'bum' around the depot."

"Apologize nothing!" muttered Chowden.

"That's right! Punch his face if he bothers you," added Tom.

"I guess two can play at that game," put in Nat Anderson cheerfully. "Here, Aleck, you and Pete mind the boilers. Maybe there'll be something doing here pretty soon," for Aleck and Pete were rather small lads, and Nat did not want to get them in trouble with the bully and his crony.

"What you buttin' in for?" growled Jerry, turning to Nat. "I ain't said anything to you, but if you're looking for trouble you can have all you want."

"That's right," murmured Tom. "I'll take him on with pleasure."



"Are you going to apologize?" asked Jack sharply.

"Not so's you could notice it," sneered Jerry. "I owe you a good threshing for having me expelled, and I'm going to give it to you," and he began to take off his coat.

Though it was some time since Jack had been instrumental in Jerry's dismissal from Washington Hall, the bully had not forgotten it, though, actually, it was Sam Chalmers who gave the evidence that really convicted Chowden, as told in the first volume of this series, "Jack Ranger's School-days."

Nor was this the only affair between Jack and Jerry, for, as told in the third volume of the series, "Jack Ranger's School Victories," the bully had sought to have Jack dismissed by alleging that our hero had copied a certain essay, but through the aid of friends Jack had been able to show that it was a dastardly trick on Chowden's part.

Now Jack was not at all averse to an encounter with the bully. In fact, he rather welcomed it, for, though not fond of fighting, Jack "could keep his end up," as the boys said. And that there was going to be a fight was evident from Jerry's actions.

Tom Adams seemed anxious to take a hand in it



also, for he began unbuttoning his coat, and approached Nat. Jack did not want a wholesale *melée*, in such a public place as the depot, but there seemed to be no way out of it. He certainly was not going to run away.

"I'm going to give you the best licking you ever had," muttered Jerry, as he walked closer, doubling up his fists, and assuming a pugilistic attitude. "I have just time for it before my train comes."

So sudden had been the appearance of the bully and his crony, that Jack had no time to speculate on what brought him to Denton.

"I'm not anxious to fight," said Jack quietly; "but I guess I can give you what you are looking for, Chowden."

"And the same here, with my compliments, Tom Adams," added Nat. "Come one, come all, this depot shall fly from its firm base as soon as I," he recited majestically.

"That's what you think now, but you'll soon sing on the other side of your mouth," sneered Tom. "Come on, Jerry. Let's polish 'em off good."

Both the lads were bullies and cowards, but they were tall and strong, and, at first sight, more than a match for Jack and his chum. Seeing that there



was likely to be a fight, Pete and Aleck, carrying the wash boilers, moved out of the zone of hostilities.

"They're running away!" exclaimed Jerry with a laugh, as he noticed what the other boys were doing. "We'll give them a drubbing next."

"Better finish us first," remarked Jack coolly, as he took off his coat, an example followed by Nat. There was no one about the depot at this hour, and the station agent had gone down to the freight house to see about some goods, so there was no likelihood of interference.

"Come back here, you cowards!" called Tom tauntingly to Pete and Aleck.

But the younger boys had no notion of running away. They made a circle, and came up behind the two bullies, who were now quite close to Tom and Jack.

"So you thought I'd apologize, did you?" asked Jerry in sneering tones of Jack.

"I think you ought to, and I think you will before I get through with you."

"Yes, and I'll make this sneak, Anderson, wish he'd never seen me," added Tom.

The four belligerents were now quite close to each other. Fists were doubled, arms and legs were tense, and breaths came rather faster than



normally, at the beginning of the fistic battle. As usual, each lad waited for a good opening, or for a beginning of hostilities on the part of his opponent, that he might know how best to conduct his attack or defense.

Jack, looking into Jerry's eyes, saw a sudden shift that betokened that the bully was about to strike. Then, glancing for a brief instant beyond his enemy, Jack saw something else. So did Nat.

This was nothing else than the sight of Pete and Aleck softly approaching the enemy from the rear, each of the smaller lads holding out his wash boiler before him. Their purpose was evident. They accomplished it a moment later.

With a sudden motion Jack lowered his head, as if he was going to butt Jerry like an angry goat. At the same moment he extended his arms before him, and quickly pushed the bully from him. Nat Anderson, who understood like a flash what was up, did the same thing.

The effect was most unexpected. Vainly pawing the air to retain their balances, the two mean lads went over backward, struggling to retain their footing. Over they went, and then they fell, doubled up, into the yawning mouths of the wash boilers, which were waiting to receive them, having been placed in position by Aleck and Pete.



"Ow!" yelled Jerry, the exclamation coming from him involuntarily, he was so surprised.

"Wh — wh — what's happened?" demanded Tom in bewilderment, as he found himself held fast in the grip of the boiler. He tried to rise but he could not, for the elastic sides of the tin receptacle held him fast.

"I — I can't get up!" cried Jerry, who was in a similar plight.

"Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho! He! He!" laughed Aleck, and he began to giggle. "Oh, dear! Somebody hold me!" he cried, doubling up with mirth.

Then came the shrill whistle of a train. Jerry and his crony struggled harder than ever to extricate themselves. But they were in fast, and wherever they went, like the lamb that followed Mary to school, the boilers went also. Finally the two bullies had to squat down on their knees, and, doubling up as much as possible, so as to make their bodies smaller, they were able to slip out of their tin shells. They arose, dusty, red-faced and angry.

"You — you — you —" sputtered Jerry, rushing at Jack, and shaking his fist.

"Here's our train, Jerry!" called Tom. "Come on. We'll fix him the next time!"



"Yes, catch your train," cried Jack, between spells of laughter. "You can apologize another time."

"You might take one of the boilers along for a souvenir of your visit to Denton," suggested Nat, joining in the mirth, while Pete and Aleck had to hold each other up, they were laughing so hard.

The train rolled into the depot, and the two bullies made a rush for it. As he climbed the steps of one of the cars, Jerry looked back to shake his fist at Jack.

"That was better than giving them a good walloping," observed Jack, as he wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes.

"Hannibal's griddle-cakes! I guess it was," agreed Nat. "Oh! But they were a sight; stuck in those boilers! Pete — Aleck, you deserve a gold medal for thinking of it."

"Pete did," spoke Aleck. "I got to giggling so I couldn't hardly do anything."

"And the boilers aren't hurt a bit," observed Jack calmly, as he examined them. "They'll do for the serenade yet."



## CHAPTER III

### FUN WITH "FATHEAD" FARSON

JACK gazed meditatively at the train which was bearing Jerry Chowden and Tom Adams out of sight.

"I wonder what they were doing here?" he said, speaking aloud as was his habit, sometimes, when thinking deeply.

"Maybe Davidson could tell us," suggested Nat.

"Who; the station agent?"

"Sure. They must have changed cars here and they're just the kind to talk to everyone they meet about what they're going to do. Chowden never could keep anything to himself."

"We'll ask Davidson," decided Jack. "Here he comes now."

The agent was returning from the freight house, and he stopped as he saw that the boys wanted to speak to him. He had seen nothing of the row.

"Yes, I know the two young fellers you mean," the agent said, in reply to Jack's question. "Why,



they got off the Lakeside Express because that didn't stop at Haddonville, where they wanted to go, and they had to wait for the local. I heard 'em talkin' about it, an' sayin' what a poor road this was to travel on. I guess it's not so bad."

"It's a good road," declared Jack, and then, as the agent went back into his office our hero remarked to his chums:

"I think I understand it. Tom Adams has an uncle living in Haddonville. I heard some of the fellows at the Academy say he and Chowden were going to spend part of the summer there. They thought they could travel there in style, but they had to get off here to take a local train. That's how they happened to see us."

"Very likely we haven't seen the last of 'em then," said Nat. "Haddonville's only fifteen miles from here, and they may drop in on us again."

"We'll be ready for 'em," put in Pete. "These wash boilers will come in handy again."

"I wish the train with Sam and Bony would come in," murmured Jack. "It's most time for it."

While the boys are waiting for the arrival of Jack's school chums, there will, perhaps, be no better time than the present to tell something about



the principal character of this book, and sketch something of his friends.

Jack Ranger was a wide-awake American lad, one of the best of his kind, who was fonder of a joke and a good time than he was of eating. He lived with his father, Robert Ranger, and three maiden aunts in the town of Denton.

The aunts, Angelina, Josephine and Mary Stebins, had taken care of Jack for several years, when he was a small boy, when there was some mystery connected with his life. This mystery concerned his father.

In the first volume of this series, called "Jack Ranger's Schooldays," there was related the activities of Jack, and his special chum, Nat, in Denton. Their doings were so lively that the boys were sent to a boarding school, at the head of which was Dr. Henry Mead. The school was called Washington Hall, or, sometimes, Lakeside Academy, from the fact that it was on Rudmore Lake. There Jack made a host of friends, and some enemies, including the bully Chowden, his crony Tom Adams, and others in that set. Among Jack's particular chums were Sam Chalmers, one of the baseball players at the Academy; Dick Balmore, called "Bony" from the fact that he



was quite thin, and John Smith, a half-breed Indian student.

The latter, and his father, it appeared later, were concerned in the mystery surrounding Jack's father. Mr. Ranger, as Jack learned in a peculiar way, had been obliged to go into hiding in the west, in connection with a land deal, in which was concerned a man named Orion Tevis. The clue to Mr. Ranger's whereabouts was held by Mr. Tevis, and the key to it was a certain odd ring, which was owned by Jack's aunts, and which was stolen from the Denton jewelry store, where it was sent to be repaired. John Smith, the Indian student, had a similar ring, and, after some stirring times at the school, Jack and John decided they would go west in search of Mr. Ranger. Mr. Smith had, just before his death, given his half-breed son the ring.

How they went, and what happened to them there was told in the second volume, entitled "Jack Ranger's Western Trip." In that was related how Jack, with John Smith and Nat Anderson, went to a ranch owned by an uncle of Nat, and what exciting times they had getting there.

A certain faker, whose real name was Hemp Smith, but who assumed the title Marinello



Booghoobally, and who pretended to be an East Indian mystic, was responsible for part of their trouble. He stole from Jack a certain card, which was needed to locate Mr. Tevis, but Jack cleverly got it back. Then in the wilds of the West the three lads had many more experiences, some fraught with danger. But they located Mr. Ranger at last and succeeded, after some hardships, in getting him back east to Denton. There was no longer a necessity for Mr. Ranger to remain in hiding, he having gone into voluntary exile to prevent the serving on him of certain legal papers, which would have proved disastrous for a friend.

In the third volume, called "Jack Ranger's School Victories," was related what befell Jack at certain track, gridiron and diamond contests.

Jack was an athlete of no small abilities, and he succeeded in keeping the name of Washington Hall well to the fore in the sports and games in which he took part.

But it was not all easy sailing. His enemies felt vindictive toward him, and they succeeded in creating considerable trouble. Not the least of these enemies was the same Hemp Smith whom Jack had once unmasked when he was to give a lecture on theosophy in Denton, before a society of which our hero's aunts were members. Hemp



Smith, *alias* Marinello Booghoobally, did his best to annoy and injure Jack, but the plucky lad proved too much for the rascal.

Jack took part in several stirring events at the Academy. He made more friends than ever, and not a few enemies, and the anger which was felt by Jerry Chowden and his cronies was in no wise diminished.

When this story opens, Jack and his chum, Nat Anderson, had only been home from boarding school a few days, at the close of the spring term. The long summer vacation was before them, and to better enjoy part of it Jack had invited Sam Chalmers and Bony Balmore to spend a month or six weeks with him. The boys anticipated some stirring times, but they did not bargain for the strange adventures which befell them.

"My, but that train must be later than the agent said it was," remarked Nat at length. "Let's ask if the wreck is cleared away yet."

"Yes, if we stay here much longer it'll be dinner time. I'm getting hungry now," observed Pete Ruggles.

"Yes, there'll be another half hour delay," replied the agent, when Jack had asked the question. "They couldn't get the wreck cleared away as quick as they thought they could."



"Well, we'll have to wait, that's all," said Jack to his chums. "It'll never do to have our serenade go to waste after all the trouble I went to."

"Certainly not," agreed Nat. "Far be it from me, brave comrade, to suggest such a thing. If yon base-born slave hungers for the flesh-pots of Egypt —"

"I'd just as leave have a ham sandwich or an ice cream soda, as all the flesh-pots of Egypt, Europe, Africa and Australia, Nat," said Pete. "I'm just plain hungry."

"Here comes Fathead Farson," said Jack suddenly. "Let's have some fun with him, and that will make the time pass quicker."

Archibald Farson, sometimes called that name when the boys wanted to provoke him, more commonly known as Archie, and more commonly still as "Fathead" because he looked it, was a jelly-faced, indolent, wall-eyed lad of the town, who was something of a common nuisance, as he was generally "butting-in," or appearing where he was not wanted. Consequently he was considered fair game for all sorts of jokes.

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Aleck.

"I don't know yet," replied Jack in a low voice. "I'll think of something."



Fathead Farson was now on the depot platform, approaching the four boys.

"How do you do, Archibald?" asked Jack in dulcet tones, as the indolent lad approached.

"Please don't call me that name," pleaded Archie, with a look of distress. He disliked it extremely.

"All right, Fathead, I thought —"

"Aw, say, now, fellows, don't make fun of me," begged the wall-eyed one. "Ain't I always been a friend of yours? Ain't I, Jack?"

"Well, sometimes," replied our hero, doubtfully.

"What you doin' with them boilers?" asked Archie, catching sight of the new tin receptacles.

"Um, ah, that's telling," answered Jack mysteriously. "It's a great secret."

"Aw, tell me, Jack; I won't tell any one. Honest, I won't. Cross my heart. Hope to die —"

"Oh, you'll do that fast enough if you don't stop eating pastry," put in Nat.

"Dry up!" exclaimed Fathead. "Say, Jack, go on, tell me what the boilers are for."

"Do you solemnly promise by the sacred green rose that you will never reveal the secret?"



"Sure, I promise, Jack. What is it? What are they for?"

"Remember, the green rose is the most solemn oath known to the court of Her Majesty Queen Lalapolussa! Do you swear by that?"

"Yes, yes!" promised Archie eagerly.

"Come hither, then, most humble slave of the secret of the green rose," spoke Jack in solemn tones, and he led Archie to one side. He whispered to him for a minute or two, and then with another warning sent him off toward the water tank of the station, which was down the track a few rods.

"What's up now, Jack?" asked Nat, when our hero had joined his comrades.

"We are about to initiate Fathead into the order of the mysterious green rose," replied Jack, without the semblance of a smile.

"The green rose?" asked Pete, "what's the joke."

"Hearken, and I will a tale unfold," answered the arch conspirator. "I have just informed Archie that there is coming through on this train, which bears to our hospitable town Sam and Bony —"

"Oh, cut that out and get down to facts!" exclaimed Nat. "Withering wangpoodles!"



You're worse than Professor Garlach when he wants to pay his beloved friend Professor Socrat a compliment in French."

"In plain United States, then," said Jack, "I have told Archie that there is coming on this train, Her Most Beloved Majesty Queen Lalapolussa, from Hopskipandjumpo!"

"Hopskipandjumpo?" repeated Nat. "Oh, I see, 'Hop skip and jump Oh!'"

"Yes," went on Jack. "You're a bright boy, you are. You get my meaning exactly. Well, I have told him that Queen Lalapolussa is coming through Denton on this train, and that, in appreciation of the courteous and cordial reception accorded her by the citizens of these United States, she is going to distribute some wonderful green roses, that only grow in her royal gardens of Hopskipandjumpo land. We are a committee of Dentonites to receive them from her gracious hands."

"But where's he going now?" asked Pete.

"After some water to put in these boilers, so that the wonderful green roses will not fade," replied Jack. "I told him we had to come here in such a hurry, to meet the queen and receive the green roses, that we had no time to get the water. He is going to the tank pumpman to borrow a pail,



and fill the boilers. For payment he is to receive two green roses."

"But if he fills the boilers we can't drum on them and serenade Sam and Bony," objected Nat.

"Patience, most noble Knight of the Green Rose," spoke Jack, in mock-heroic tones. "When Fathead has filled the boilers there will be something else doing. Just you watch and see. Here he comes now. Let him fill the boilers, and we'll be talking about the queen and the green roses."

As Jack spoke, the other boys saw Archie approaching, carrying two pails of water, under the weight of which he was staggering. But there was a look of determination on his face.



## CHAPTER IV

### SAM AND BONY ARRIVE

"THAT's it, Archie," said Jack kindly, as Fat-head set one pail down, and proceeded to pour the water from the other into one of the boilers.

"Did you get fresh water?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"Because green roses fade and droop very quickly. They must have fresh water."

"Oh, yes, it must be very fresh," added Nat.

"Very fresh," chorused Pete and Aleck.

"The queen was very particular to specify fresh water in her telegram, was she not?" asked Nat in an anxious voice.

"Did she telegraph you?" asked Archie, in an awe-struck voice.

"You must not refer to Queen Lalapolussa as 'she,'" spoke Jack in shocked tones.

"No?" inquired Archie.

"Most certainly not. Speak of her as 'Her Imperial Highness,' or 'Her Most Gracious Majesty,' after this, Archie."



"I will."

"And now hurry and get more water. The train will soon be here and we want the boilers full. The queen is very particular. We would help you, only we are a committee and we don't want to leave this platform. Besides, you have been initiated into the order of the green rose, and the latest one to be admitted must carry water," said Jack solemnly.

"Oh, I don't mind," answered Fathead. "I'm to get two big roses, ain't I?"

"The biggest green roses that grow," replied Jack.

"I'll guess we'll have to get him a couple of cabbages," suggested Nat, as Archie went after more water.

He had the last boiler full as the whistle of the approaching train was heard, Jack and his chums, meanwhile, keeping him from thinking about what he was doing, by talking of the imaginary queen, and her still more imaginary roses.

"Now, Archie, are you ready for the final act of the initiation?" asked Jack, as the "butter-in" stood beside the four boys.

"Is there more to it?" asked Archie anxiously.

"More to it? I should think there was! Why,



you're not half initiated yet. The last part is the best of all. You have just time for it before the train gets in."

"Will it — will it hurt?"

"Not a bit. It'll do you good, this hot day," and Jack winked at his chums, to whom he had previously whispered something that caused them to laugh as loudly as they dared.

"Well — well then, I guess I'm ready for it," announced Archie.

"You will then be entitled to receive the two green roses from the hand of the queen herself," went on Jack. "Now stand right here," and he indicated a spot around which were ranged the four boilers full of water. By this time quite a throng had gathered at the depot to see the train come in, and the people gazed curiously at the group of boys.

"Gentlemen of the mystic order of the green rose, are you all ready?" asked Jack in a solemn whisper, of his chums.

"We are," replied Nat.

"Candidate for admission to the inner circles of the court of Queen Lalapolussa, art ready?" inquired the head joker sternly.

"Sure," answered Archie.



"Knights, all is in readiness," went on Jack. "We will now proceed with the initiation. Candidate, close your eyes!"

Fathead did so.

"One, two, three! Lift!" called Jack suddenly, and, following his example, the other three boys quickly tilted the boilers up, by lifting on one handle, and four streams of water poured over Fathead, wetting him from his knees down, so that he stood, for a moment, in the midst of a foaming puddle. Jack and his chums, as soon as they tilted the boilers, had jumped back.

"You're initiated!" cried Jack with a laugh. "You are now a member of the cult of the green rose, Fathead. Here comes the train. Come on, fellows!"

"Yes, and there's Sam and Bony!" yelled Nat. "They're waving at us!"

The four serenaders caught up the boilers, grasped the sticks, adjusted the strings about their necks, and began to beat a lively if discordant tattoo.

"There's Jack!" exclaimed Sam to Bony. "And he's got his crowd with him."

"Yes, it wouldn't be Jack if he didn't have. Come on!"

The two visitors hurried out on the platform,



just as Jack and his chums came marching down it, beating with all their might on the tin boilers, and making such a racket that the crowd burst into a laugh.

"Welcome to our city!" cried Jack. "They will send you the keys down on a platter as soon as they can find the keys and the platter! How are you, Sam? Hello, Bony! Glad to see you both! Come on! Here are the boys! I guess you know Pete and Aleck. I've told you about them. Nat, of course, you can't forget."

"Jack, old boy, I'm glad to see you again!" exclaimed Sam, as if it was several years since he had parted from his friend, instead of only a week or two.

"You're a sight for sore eyes!" exclaimed Bony, as he stretched to his full height, causing a little girl in the crowd to ask her mother if that wasn't the living skeleton she had once seen in a circus.

The boys shook hands all around.

"What's that over there?" asked Sam. "Has there been a cloud burst?" and he pointed to where Archie was stepping out of the mud-puddle formed by the four boilers of water he had so laboriously carried.

"Oh, no. That's where we just initiated a



candidate into the mystical order of the green rose," explained Jack carelessly.

"I might have known you were up to some trick," said Sam.

"Well, come on," cried Jack. "All together now, fellows, make a noise! Show our distinguished fellow students from dear old Washington Hall that we're glad to see 'em."

They set up a terrific din on the boilers, and formed in line to escort Sam and Bony to Jack's house. As they passed Fathead he was cleaning the mud off his shoes on the grass.

"Just you — just you wait — Jack Ranger!" he spluttered. "I'll get even with you all right, that's what I will."

"It was all a mistake," spoke Jack. "Queen Lalapolussa didn't arrive. She took a different train. I guess Denton wasn't good enough for her," and the boys, chuckling over the well deserved, though not severe punishment, which had been visited upon the town nuisance, passed on.



## CHAPTER V

### PLANNING A CAMP

"WELL, Jack, how have you been since we last saw you?" asked Sam Chalmers, as he took his chum by the arm, an example which Bony Balmore followed on the opposite side.

"Oh, so — so. Able to sit up and take a little nourishment now and again."

"Mostly again, I guess, if you're anything like what you were at Washington Hall," spoke Bony.

"Well, maybe so," admitted Jack.

"I say," called Pete. "Aren't you going to bring your wash boiler along?" for Jack had left his reposing on the edge of the sidewalk some distance back.

"No. It has outlived its usefulness," replied Jack. "We had sport with them all right. Fathead's face was a sight."

"His feet and legs were a worse one," supplemented Nat. "His mother will call him 'A-r-c-h-i-b-a-l-d' to the tune of the long metre doxology



when he gets home. Maybe he won't butt-in next time."

"I shouldn't think he would," remarked Sam.

"Guess who we saw just before you came in," asked Jack with sudden remembrance.

"Professor Grimm?" inquired Bony, naming the person he least expected to hear about.

"That's pretty near it."

"His rascal of a nephew, Lem," ventured Sam.

"You're getting warm," declared Jack. "I'll save you brain-fag and tell you. It was Jerry Chowden, and his running-mate, Tom Adams."

"Yes, and we had a run-in with them," added Nat. "But the boilers came in useful on them, too."

"Tell us about it," demanded Sam and Bony in a breath, and Jack complied.

"If they're as near as Haddonfield," said Sam, at the conclusion of the recital, "they may take a run over some day to try to make more trouble."

"We'll give 'em all the trouble they're looking for," promised Nat with a grin. "Sinuous sea serpents! But Jerry was mad enough to bite a nail in two."

The boys talked of school matters, of sports and games, and their plans for the summer, meanwhile approaching Jack's house.



"I want you fellows to come over this evening," said our hero, as Nat, Pete and Aleck prepared to take their leave.

"Anything doing?" asked Nat.

"There may be," replied Jack. "Bring over Jim Lane and Mort Davis, if you see them."

"Same place?" asked Nat.

"Same place. The boudoir over our barn," and Jack nodded in the direction of the barn, in the loft of which he had a sort of work-shop, and a general meeting place for his chums.

"So long, then," called Nat, which was echoed by the other town lads, and Jack led his visitors into the house. Sam and Bony were warmly welcomed by Mr. Ranger and Jack's aunts. They had met Sam before, but Bony Balmore had never visited at our hero's home. Aunt Josephine, who was the soul of fun, looked critically at Bony as she was introduced to him.

"Don't you do anything for it?" she asked him solemnly.

"Do anything for what?" asked Bony in some alarm, as he gazed down at his long legs, and tried to get a view of his back.

"For that thin feeling," went on Aunt Josephine. "I don't believe you eat enough. You must let me feed you up."



"Don't, Aunt Josephine," begged Jack. "He'll eat all there is in the house, and ask for more; won't he, Sam?"

"He sure will," declared the best baseball player on the Washington Hall team.

"You fellows —" began Bony, and then he blushed at what he was going to say before the ladies.

"Josephine," said Aunt Angelina solemnly, "it isn't nice to poke fun at Jack's guest."

"I can't help it, sister," replied the jolly aunt. "He's so dreadfully — dreadfully —" and she paused for a word to describe the tall lad.

"Call him 'Bony' and done with it," said Jack. "That's what we all do. He answers to his name, is warranted sound and kind, and a lady can feed him, can't she, Bony?"

"You — you —" began the badgered one.

"I think I can prescribe something that will make you a little stouter," remarked Aunt Mary. "If you were to take boneset tea every night —"

"Spare him, for my sake," interrupted Jack. "Bony doesn't want to get fat. If he did he'd lose his chance of going in a dime museum as the living skeleton as soon as his education is completed. Don't let Aunt Mary give you any of her remedies," he went on. "I did once. She fed



me on catnip tea until I began to turn back into a baby again."

"Oh, Jack!" exclaimed his aunts in chorus.

There was a merry party at the supper table, and, as soon as the meal was over, Jack proposed an adjournment to the barn loft, which was fitted up with old but comfortable chairs, and places where the lads could loll and lounge to their hearts' content.

"Say, Jack, you've got quite a place," complimented Sam, as he gazed around by the light of a hanging lamp.

"That's what he has," added Bony. "Do you — do they feed you that way all the while, Jack?" he asked, as he thought of the bountiful supper.

"Pretty much. I'm a sort of a fatted calf, you know. If any fellow wants to be well looked after, let him get three old maid aunts, like mine, and they'll do the rest."

"You're a lucky dog," murmured Sam, stretching out on an old sofa, that had seen its best days, but was better prized by Jack on that account.

"Hark, what's that?" asked Bony suddenly, as from without there sounded the imitation of a tree-toad calling.

"Those are the boys," replied Jack, as he gave an answering whistle. Then he pulled a handle



near the head of an old divan on which he was curled up; there was a snapping sound and something seemed to fall out of a window that looked down on the side yard of the Ranger home.

"What's that?" asked Sam, in some surprise.

"Rope ladder," replied Jack. "You see," he went on, "so many schemes of — er — well, of a secret nature, were concocted in this shack, that we had to guard against prying eyes. So instead of using the regular stairs, I rigged up a rope ladder. Whenever any of my friends come to see me, I just pull this handle and it releases a spring, which holds the rope ladder rolled up. That allows it to fall to the ground, and my friends appear, as you see them now," and he waved his hand toward the window, which, at that moment framed the head of Nat Anderson, who had been the first to climb up.

"Well, I'll be pickled!" exclaimed Bony, cracking his finger joints in his excitement.

Nat was followed by Aleck Dawes and Pete Ruggles, and two other lads, the last of whom hauled up the rope ladder and fastened it in place, in a sort of box.

"Sam and Bony, these are Jim Lane and Mort Davis," spoke Jack, introducing the other two boys. "Now I guess we're all here."



The newcomers greeted Jack's guests, and all took seats in the most convenient places.

"Why didn't we come up the rope ladder?" asked Sam. "I thought you said there were no stairs, Jack, but we came up 'em."

"Oh, yes, there are stairs," admitted Jack, "but they're a peculiar kind. Just go take a look at 'em now."

Sam went to the head of the staircase which he, Jack and Bony had ascended a short time before. Just as he reached them there was a click, and the stairs seemed to fall apart. One section rose in the air, and the other part descended.

"What's that for?" asked Sam. "And how do you work it?"

"That's to disconcert the enemy," replied our hero, "and I worked it by pulling this lever. The stairs are sawed in two," he went on, as he showed Sam how, by pulling on a handle, the trick was done. "The upper part is pulled skyward by means of weights, and the lower section falls by gravity, precipitating the victim into a bottomless pit, filled with hay. It's my latest invention."

"Have you practiced on anyone yet?" inquired Bony.

"No, but I think I'll have a chance soon. I had a tip that Fathead Farson is going to sneak



around here this evening, to play a little trick on me for what we did to him this morning."

"Who gave you the tip?" asked Nat.

"Budge Rankin."

"What, the assistant janitor at the Hall? Oh, yes, I forgot you told me he lived here," said Sam. Budge was a queer lad, who had been a sort of tramp, but who had been befriended by Jack, who afterward got him the position of assistant janitor at Washington Hall. In return, Budge, who had two odd habits, that of chewing gum and sometimes talking so fast that all his words ran together, had become the firm friend of his benefactor.

"Budge tipped me off," went on Jack. "He said he overheard Fathead asking Tim Rollinson to come over here and help him put this place on the blink. Budge hurried off to tell me, and got to the house when you and Bony, Sam, were washing up for supper. So I'm all ready for him. It took me a week, some time ago, to fix these stairs, but I guess they'll be worth the trouble."

"But if he sees a light here, and hears us talking, he'll not come," said Nat.

"He'll neither see nor hear until I want him to," declared Jack. "Guess I'll douse the glims now."



Fellows, lay low. He may be along any moment. If he does come, there'll be some fun."

The lights were extinguished, and Jack, having rearranged the trick steps, took his position near the operating lever. The lads conversed in whispers for half an hour or more, and then, at a sudden signal from Jack, ceased.

"I think I hear some one approaching," he said. "Nat, get the bull's-eye lantern ready to flash when I give the word."

Nat knew where to find things in the darkness of the loft, and soon announced that he was ready.

Presently those hiding in the barn heard cautious footsteps climbing up the stairs. Then came soft whispers.

"They're out," spoke a voice that Jack and Nat had no difficulty in recognizing as Fathead's.

"That's good," was the reply from one whom they guessed was Tim. "We'll turn the place topsy-turvy."

"I told him I'd get even," went on Fathead, "but I guess he'll be surprised when he sees what I can do."

"I guess he'll be surprised when he sees what I'm going to do," murmured Jack, in Nat's ear.

Jack kept count of the footsteps, that he might



determine when Fathead and his crony were in the proper place. Then he gave the lever a sudden yank.

There was a rattle of boards and weights, followed by startled cries from the two conspirators, and, a moment later, there flashed down the dark stairway the brilliant gleam of a small, portable, electric bull's-eye lamp. It showed a curious scene.

In a sort of pit, lined with hay and straw, so they could not possibly be hurt, stood Fathead and Tim. They looked up in ludicrous amazement, blinking at the light.

"Good evening, boys," said Jack calmly, as his chums stood grouped about him. "Why didn't you send word you were coming and I would have met you with my auto. Why, dear me, something must have happened! You have broken my stairs!" he added, as if in surprise.

"You let us up out of here, Jack Ranger!" cried Fathead.

"Yes, we might have broken our arms or legs, and you'd be to blame," added Tim. "We could have you arrested for this."

"Oh, no, you couldn't," replied Jack sweetly. "You were trespassing, and trespassers have no rights under the law. Judge Bennett told me that when I got bit by Deacon Gray's bulldog the day



I snibbed some apples from his orchard," he added.

"Well, you let us up out of here!" demanded Fathead.

"Yes, you'd better," went on Tim.

"I guess I'll let you stay there awhile and think over some new trick to play on me," decided Jack, as he closed a door at the head of the stairs.

"Oh! Oh! Don't leave us in the dark!" begged Fathead, in alarm.

"You sneaked in here in the dark, and you oughtn't to mind it," was Jack's reply.

"Are you going to leave them there?" asked Sam.

"They can get out now," said Jack, pulling on another cord. "This opens a small side door in the hay pit, and they can crawl out. But I'm going to let them discover it for themselves."

"Say, you're the limit!" exclaimed Bony admiringly. "How do you think of all these things?"

"They come to me in my dreams," replied Jack, without the trace of a smile. "Now I guess we can light the lamps, 'On with the dance, let joy be unconfined!'"

"No, Fathead and Tim are the only ones who are confined around here," spoke Nat.



When the lights were set aglow again, Jack went to a cupboard and brought out some cakes, and bottles of ginger ale, and soda water.

"I'm like Old Mother Hubbard," he said, "only I haven't any bones in my cupboard, you know. Bony has enough and to spare. Here, Bony, sit on the other side of the table. I don't want you to fall asleep and topple over on me. I've got thin clothes on, and though you have several fine points about you, I don't care to have them stick in me."

Bony fired a thick magazine at his tormentor, but Jack dodged it, though he spilled a plate of cookies in the scuffle.

"I say, fellows," went on Jack, when his guests were as busily engaged in eating, as though they had not had supper three hours before, "what are you going to do this summer? Made any plans, any of you?"

"I'd sort of like to go camping," spoke Bony. "You don't have to dress up much then."

"Camping sounds good," added Nat. "I wonder if we couldn't manage it, Jack."

"I'd like to. We had considerable of it, of a certain kind, when we went west last year, but I could stand more. I wonder if John Smith could be induced to go along."



"I don't think so," replied Sam. "He told me he was going to teach in a summer school on one of the Indian reservations."

"Then he's out of it."

"How many could go camping?" asked Aleck Dawes, for he was not sure whether Jack would care to include in the party of his school chums, any of the town boys.

"As many as want to," replied Jack heartily. "This bunch here would make a nice crowd to go. Could you fellows manage it?" and he looked at Jim, Pete, Mort and Aleck.

"I guess so," replied Mort. "Where would we go?"

"I vote for some place on the sea coast," put in Nat. "That would be the best. We could get the woods and the ocean then."

"Sounds good," agreed Jack. "I think —"

What he was about to say was suddenly interrupted by a crash at one of the windows. A stone had broken the glass and knocked a chimney from one of the lamps. The boys sprang to their feet in excitement.



## CHAPTER VI

### AN UNLUCKY STRIKE

"WHO did that?" cried Nat.

"Easy enough to guess who it was," replied Jack calmly, after the first minute of excitement.

"You mean Fathead?"

"Either he or Tim. I'm rather inclined to think it was Tim. Fathead is too big a coward to risk doing that. Tim's got more spunk."

"Come on after them," proposed Sam, making for the stairway.

"It takes too long to put that in shape again," objected Jack.

"The rope ladder, then —"

"Let 'em go," advised Jack. "They think they're even with us now, and it will save trouble in the end. I've got some glass to mend the window with, and there are more lamp chimneys around the house."

"You take it easy," came from Bony.

"Oh, well, maybe I rubbed it in a little too hard on Fathead and Tim," admitted Jack. "They'll



have more fun telling how they think they scared this crowd, and broke a window in my barn, than anything that's happened to them in a year. Let 'em go. I don't mind."

"I guess they're pretty mad," commented Aleck.

"Fathead will be sneaking around in a few days, trying to find out some of our plans," remarked Nat. "Better not let him know we're going camping or he'll want to go 'long."

"That's so, we were talking about camping," said Jack. "Well, let's go on."

They proceeded to discuss the subject in all its details, from boating, bathing and fishing, to hunting in the woods, the best way to build a campfire, and the most approved method of putting up a tent.

"Have we really decided that we're going to camp?" asked Nat, when there came a lull in the talk.

"Well, I think I'll go," decided Jack. "I've got a good tent. How about you and Bony, Sam?"

"I'll go," declared Bony, and Sam nodded an assent. Nat was also sure he could go anywhere his chum Jack went, but the other lads would have to talk it over with their parents first, so it was decided to leave the matter open for a few days



longer. In the meanwhile, Jack and his chums from Washington Hall, including Nat, were to prospect about, and learn, by inquiry or otherwise, where would be a good place to set up their tent.

It was nearly midnight when the little gathering broke up, Sam and Bony accompanying Jack into the house, and the other youths making for their homes.

"Don't forget the ball game to-morrow," urged Sam, as they parted, for in his enthusiasm he had, earlier that evening, induced Jack and his chums to arrange a practice match on the town diamond, for Sam could no more live without an occasional game of ball than he could without eating. In fact, he would rather go without his meals than the game.

It was no trouble to get together a crowd of boys to play baseball when Jack and Nat started out with that end in view. Soon after breakfast the next morning there were enough lads on the village diamond to organize two nines and more. In honor of Jack's two guests, Sam and Bony were each allowed to captain a nine, and soon the game was in full swing, with Jack pitching on Sam's nine, and Nat on Bony's.

The lads were pretty evenly matched, but, by an unlucky play by a member of Sam's team, Bony's



was one run ahead when it came noon-time, and as most of the youths had strict injunctions to be home for the mid-day meal, under penalty of not getting any, they wanted to quit.

"We'll play one more inning," decided Sam. "We want a chance to beat you fellows."

This was agreed to, and Sam's nine had last chance at the bat. Sam made one run, tying the score, but Aleck, who got up next, struck out.

Jim Lane, who followed him, did likewise, and then it came Jack's turn. Our hero stepped confidently to the bat, for he knew something of Nat's curves, and was sure that he could at least rap out a three-bagger, if not a home run.

"Now, Jack, old boy, do your best," urged Sam. "Make believe it's Jerry Chowden you're going to hit, and swipe the horse-hide for all you're worth."

"All right," agreed Jack easily. "Here goes for a home run or a broken bat."

He struck with all his might at the first ball which Nat pitched, and he felt a thrill of pleasure as the willow stick met the sphere with a resounding "pang" which told of a good hit.

"Run! Run, Jack! Run!" yelled Sam, and Jack, flinging aside the bat, sprinted for first.

Straight out to left field sped the ball, the fielder making a vain leap for it as it passed over his head.



Jack had reached first, and was sprinting toward second, when there came a yell from the assembled crowd of boys that told of something more than a baseball incident. Jack gave one look in the direction of the ball he had struck, and was startled to see the horse-hide sphere landed square in the face of a man who was crossing the furthestmost boundary of the diamond. The man went down as if he was shot, and Jack, losing all interest in the game, at the thought of having hit someone, rushed toward the man. The other players did likewise.

Jack found the stranger sitting on the ground, supported by the left fielder, and the man's face was covered with blood.

"Did I — are you much — are you badly hurt?" panted Jack as he came up.

The man looked up quickly, wiping the blood away from his nose, which had been struck by the ball.

"So you're the one who threw that at me; eh?" he demanded.

"I didn't throw it," replied Jack. "It was a batted ball. I struck it."

"Well, it's likely to prove an unlucky strike for you," went on the man. "Can't some of you get



me a pail of water?" he demanded in no gentle voice. "I must look like a fright, all covered with blood."

"It was an accident," said Jack. "I'm very sorry."

"You'll be sorrier yet, before I'm through with you," snapped the man. "Where's the water?" he continued angrily.

"Bring the water pail here, Aleck," said Nat, and the lad started after it.

"I didn't see you coming, or I would have waited. I usually knock a ball into left field," explained Jack. "You must be a stranger in town. None of the people here cross the diamond when a game is in progress."

"Do you mean to say I haven't a right to cross where I did?" demanded the man, rising to his feet.

"Oh, you have a right to, only it isn't usual. I'm very sorry —"

"There! You needn't say that again," interrupted the man. "I'll attend to your case presently."

"He's a regular fire-eater," murmured Sam, aside to Jack.

"Well, I reckon it must have hurt him pretty



bad to get hit on the nose," admitted Jack. "I guess this breaks up the game. Anyhow, it's a tie, but I could have fetched in that run."

By this time Aleck had brought the pail of water, and the man washed the blood from his face. His nose, the boys could see, was swollen to about twice its size.

"If you would like to come to my house I'll see that you get a clean collar," proposed Jack, for the man's linen was soiled with blood.

"I'll come to your house, but not to get a clean collar," replied the stranger vindictively. "I'll come to settle this affair. Is there an officer near here?" he asked of several of the boys, turning away from Jack.

"An officer? What for?" inquired Sam.

"I'm going to have this young scoundrel arrested for assault and battery."

"It was an accident," exclaimed Jack.

"It was not. You did it on purpose," declared the man, more angry then before. "I'll have you arrested for it, too. Take me to an officer," he demanded imperiously.

None of the boys moved. Some looked a little frightened.

"Do you hear?" went on the man. "Take me to an officer! I want to swear out a warrant for



this boy's arrest. I've a good notion to have you all arrested."

"We have a right to play ball here," spoke up Nat. "You took a risk when you crossed the diamond."

"I did, eh? Well, we'll see about that! Come! come! Are you going to tell me where I can find an officer?"

"Go look for one," advised Nat.

"None of your impudence, young man!" exclaimed the stranger. "Evidently you don't know who I am, and what influence I possess."

"I am very sorry this happened," said Jack, manfully. "I don't believe, if you have me arrested, that any good will come of it. It was a pure accident."

"If I can't punish you criminally I'll sue you civilly for damages!" blustered the man. "I guess pedestrians have some rights. You have probably broken my nose, and you'll suffer for it. It is very painful."

The stranger probably spoke the truth about the injury being painful.

"Very well," he went on, when he saw none of the boys making a move to lead him to an officer, or tell him where he could find one. "I shall get a policeman myself, and he'll arrest



you at once," he said, looking angrily at Jack.

He started to leave the field, the crowd of boys opening to make room for him. At that instant another man approached the group of lads.

"Why, what's the matter, Jack?" the newcomer asked, and Jack turned to behold his father. "Is anyone hurt?" went on Mr. Ranger.

"Yes, dad," replied Jack. "I knocked a ball over here, and unfortunately, it struck this gentleman on the nose."

"It certainly did, and I'm going to cause his arrest for assault and battery!" exclaimed the man turning back. "I'm on my way now to find an officer. It's a shame —"

He stopped suddenly at the sight of Mr. Ranger, and a curious look came over his face. He hesitated, and seemed about to beat a precipitate retreat.

"Jonas Lavine! What are you doing here?" exclaimed Mr. Ranger, as he looked the man full in the face. "I thought you had gone out west!"

"Well — er — I — er — that is — I think I must catch my train!" exclaimed the man in great confusion, and, evidently losing all thought of causing Jack's arrest, the man turned in the opposite direction, and made for the depot as fast as he could walk.



## CHAPTER VII

### MR. RANGER'S STORY

THE sudden change of front on the part of the man, whom Mr. Ranger had evidently recognized, surprised the boys.

"Do you know him, Mr. Ranger?" asked Sam, as he looked at the retreating form of Jonas Lavine.

"I used to," replied Jack's father with a strange manner. "How did the accident happen?"

The boys all tried to talk at once in telling how the affair had occurred, but Mr. Ranger managed to gather an idea of it in spite of the confusion of tongues.

"He would have had no right to cause any arrest," he said. "This baseball diamond is private property, as far as strangers are concerned, and those who walk across it do so at their own risk. Still, I'm glad he was not badly hurt."

"Do you think he will make any trouble?" asked Nat.



"I fancy not," replied Mr. Ranger dryly. "He did not expect to see me here, and I think he will leave town on the first train. But, Jack, I think it's time for dinner. Your aunts sent me looking for you, as they have arranged a special feast of chicken and dumplings to-day, and Aunt Angelina is so afraid the dumplings will get heavy if you don't come right away. So I volunteered to fetch you."

"Chicken and dumplings, oh, my!" exclaimed Nat in ecstasy, as he heard what Mr. Ranger said.

"Come ahead and have some," invited Jack cordially, for he was the most generous lad in the world. He would have asked the whole ball-field of boys, only all except his more intimate chums had dispersed, as they knew their own meals were ready.

"Yes, come on, boys," supplemented Mr. Ranger, including in the invitation, Nat, Aleck and Pete, in addition to Sam and Bony. "There's plenty of room, and I guess Jack knows his aunts always cook about twice as much as is necessary, for they never can tell when they're going to have company," and he laughed.

The little party moved across the diamond toward Jack's house. As they neared the edge of the field, and turned into a street leading to the



Ranger home, Sam, who was walking in advance with Jack, nudged his chum suddenly in the ribs.

"Here! What you doing that for?" demanded Jack.

"Look there," spoke Sam quietly, pointing to the figure of a youth, not far ahead of them.

"Jerry Chowden, or I'm a butter-fingers!" cried Jack. "Look, Nat."

"Glittering goblets!" exclaimed Nat. "Our friend the enemy! What's he doing here? I didn't notice him before."

"I did," remarked Aleck Dawes. "He was over in right field when you hit that fellow with the ball. He saw the accident and started toward the man, but when he saw you coming, he turned back. I didn't have a chance to tell you before, but I knew he was the same fellow you had trouble with at the depot."

"I wonder what he's doing here?" repeated Jack. "Tom Adams doesn't seem to be with him."

"Maybe he was looking for a chance to get even with you, Jack," suggested Nat. "Haddonville isn't much of a ride from here."

"That's so. I wish I'd seen Jerry before. I'd have given him all the chance he wanted."

"Oh, you've had trouble enough for one day,"



remarked Sam. "Only for your dad recognizing that chap you might be in jail now."

"Not much danger," replied our hero. "I wonder what dad knows about Jonas Lavine, that made the man skip out so quickly," thought Jack. "I must ask him."

Mr. Ranger had gone on ahead, to warn the three aunts that a crowd of hungry boys were coming, that they might be prepared for the attack of the enemy on the victuals. Jack and his friends watched Jerry until he was out of sight, but the bully did not turn around, and gave no sign that he had seen our hero.

"Guess he's going to the depot," ventured Nat. "I hope he stays in Haddonville. I don't like him around, or in the same town where I am."

"I have no use for him, either," admitted Sam. "He's a sneak and a coward, and Tom Adams is no better."

The boys soon switched to baseball, as a happier subject, and talked that the rest of the way home, Sam urging that some more games be played as soon as possible. Full justice was done to the chicken and dumplings, to the no small delight of Aunt Angelina, who liked to see hungry boys eat.

"What you going to do this afternoon, Jack?"



asked Nat, as he rose slowly from the table. Moving quickly, after such a meal as he had eaten, was out of the question.

"I'm going to rest for awhile," replied Jack. "I don't want to go where there are any chickens, either," he added. "I'm ashamed to look one in the face, after I've put away so much of their brethren. But it certainly was good," he finished with a sigh, regretting, perhaps, that he could not partake of more.

"I move we all take a rest," proposed Bony.

"He's afraid of running all his fat off," explained Sam, with a grin at his chum. "Lie around lots, Bony, and you'll soon get out of the bantam weight class."

The boys did not feel much like exercise so soon after the meal, and they found comfortable places on the porch, in easy chairs, or on the big lawn, where, under trees, restful hammocks were hung.

Jack, after seeing that his guests were at ease, went into the house to get a book to read. He saw his father in the library, looking over some papers.

"Hello, dad," he called. "I didn't know you were here. Say, who was that fellow I hit? You seemed to know him."



"I do know him, and I regret to say I know very little good of him," replied Mr. Ranger. "I wish you had not come in contact with him, and I regret that it was the ball you batted that hit him."

"Why, dad?"

"Because he is a very vindictive man, and he may yet try to make trouble for you?"

"How can he?"

"I don't know, but I think he will try. I had no idea he was in this part of the country. If you see him again steer clear of him."

"Why, is he so dangerous?"

"Not specially dangerous, but he is a bad man. He is quite wealthy, but he is a sharper from Wall street, New York. He is a promoter of all sorts of risky schemes. Once he tried to involve me, and unthinkingly I got mixed up with him in a deal. That was just before I had to go out west to escape the service of legal papers, which might have resulted disastrously for my friend Mr. Orion Tevis. Jonas Lavine, who sometimes goes by other names, managed to get some money out of me, but I got it back, and I got out of his clutches.

"I know something of his games, and if I wished I could have him arrested on an old charge, the consequences of which, so far, he has escaped.



That is why he fears me, and why he left so suddenly when I confronted him."

"He talked very high and mighty to me, but he soon came down off his high horse when you appeared," commented Jack. "I hope he doesn't make any trouble for you, over this affair, or that other one, either. You had trouble enough."

"I do not fancy he will annoy me," replied Mr. Ranger, "but if I were you I would keep clear of him. He would not hesitate to do you bodily harm if he got the chance, and I know he cherishes a resentment against me. He would like to get hold of some of my money that I succeeded in saving from him, and other sharpers like him. Be on your guard, Jack."

"I will, dad," replied Jack. He did not know how soon he would be obliged to defend himself against the wiles and snares of Jonas Lavine and his tools.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CHOWDEN AND LAVINE PLOT

WHEN Jerry Chowden reached the Denton depot, whither he went from the ball field, to get a train for Haddonville, he saw standing on the platform a man whose nose was considerably swelled, and upon whose linen were spots of blood.

"That's the man who got hit with the ball Jack Ranger batted," mused Jerry. "I'll bet he's good and mad. He must have got an awful whack."

Jerry walked past the man, glancing casually at him. He did not know the stranger, but the latter, accosting Jerry, asked:

"Do you know when the next train leaves for Haddonville? I am in a hurry to get there."

"It leaves in half an hour," replied Jerry. "Do you live in Haddonville? I happen to be stopping there."

"No, I don't live there," answered the man, tenderly feeling of his nose, "but I am stopping there for a few days. I don't seem to remember you."



"I am at the Jefferson House," went on the former bully of Washington Hall.

"The Jefferson House? It's odd I haven't seen you around there."

"I have only been there since yesterday. I was visiting a friend of mine, Tom Adams, at his uncle's home, but his uncle was taken ill yesterday, and Tom had to go back home. I thought I'd stay in the town a little longer, so I went to the hotel."

"Well, I've been so busy with certain large financial matters that I haven't had time to notice anybody about the hotel," went on Lavine. "That accounts for me not seeing you. What floor are you on?"

"The second."

"So am I. We must be neighbors."

"It seems so," admitted Jerry. "You got quite a severe crack from that ball," he went on.

"What! Did you see the outrageous act of that young ruffian?"

"Yes sir, I was looking at the game, and I saw him bat the ball in your direction."

"I believe he did it on purpose," declared Lavine.

"I am sure he did," agreed Jerry, readily.



"I'd like to find out his name," went on the man with the swelled nose.

"I know who it was."

"Who? Tell me and I'll swear a warrant out for his arrest. I would have done so at once, only I have to hurry back to transact some business in Haddonville."

"His name is Jack Ranger."

"Jack Ranger!" cried the man. "So, it was Robert Ranger's son who served me this trick, eh? Well, now I know how to act."

"Do you know him?" asked Jerry.

"Do you?" inquired the man quickly. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"Not much of a friend," replied Jerry bitterly. "I hate him worse than any boy at Washington Hall, except maybe Sam Chalmers or Bony Baltimore."

"Ah, then you were at school with him," remarked Lavine smoothly, for already he had begun to form a plot in his mind, and he saw a tool ready to his hand to aid him in carrying it out.

"Yes, he was in the same school where I was, but I could not stand him or his chums, and so I left."

"Do you know much about him?" went on the man.



"More than I want to."

"He seems an uppish sort of a chap," continued Lavine, for he was a good reader of character, and he saw that if he took the right methods he might learn considerable from Jerry.

"He's too fresh!" exclaimed the former bully. "I owe him a grudge for several things he did to me."

"I think I owe him one also, for what he did to me," declared the man, again tenderly feeling of his nose, while a grim smile parted his thin lips, and gave his mean face a still meaner look. "Perhaps if we were to work together we might make Jack Ranger feel that he didn't have things all his own way."

"I wish we could," declared Jerry. "I came over from Haddonville to-day, to see if there was any opportunity for me to get square with him, but I didn't see any chance. I'll get one some day, though."

"I hope you do, and that I do also," remarked Lavine. "Are you doing anything in particular these days?"

"No, nothing much. I was thinking of going to work, but I can't find just the right kind of an opening. I think I'll go to New York."

"New York would be just the place for a bright



young chap like you," said Lavine, thinking to himself that he could use Jerry in some of his schemes.

"Do you know of an opening there?" inquired Jack's enemy.

"Hum, well, no, not at present, but perhaps I could find something myself for you to do. I need a little clerical help and perhaps you could do what I wanted. It is not difficult."

"I'll try," said Jerry, "only I must have good pay. My folks are fairly well off, and I would not work for what an ordinary clerk got."

"Nor should I expect you to. I know a smart young man when I see one. I would pay you good wages if you wish a few weeks' employment."

"It will do no harm to try it," declared Jerry, who, to tell the truth, was rather short of spending money, and who had used so much lately that he dared not apply to his parents for more.

Lavine went into particulars, describing some simple clerical work he wished done, and promising to pay Jerry well for it. The former bully accepted, and the man smiled to himself to think how easily the youth had played into his hands.

By skillful questioning Lavine learned considerable concerning Jack and Mr. Ranger — information that he decided would enable him to carry



out certain plans he had formed to injure the man who had once escaped his clutches.

"And I think we can pay young Ranger back for some of his insolence," said the man to Jerry.

"I hope so. I would like to see him suffer for what he did to me."

"If we get the chance we'll fix him," declared Lavine. "But I think this is our train," he added, and a little later the two conspirators were being whirled toward Haddonville, talking on the way of what they hoped to do to Jack, if once they got him into their power.



## CHAPTER IX

### OFF TO CAMP

JACK was not a little worried by what his father had told him concerning Jonas Lavine, but, after thinking the matter over, he decided that the Wall street sharper would probably not try to annoy him any further.

"If he does," said Jack to himself, as he went out of the library, to find some of his chums, "I'll threaten him with exposure on dad's account, or else I'll take a baseball bat to him. That'll scare him out. Anyhow, I don't believe he'll come around here again."

Jack found the boys now wide awake, all of them having taken short naps after the hearty meal.

"Come on, let's do something," proposed Sam. "I'm getting lazy. I'll be all out of training for baseball if we keep this up long."

They followed Jack and Sam down to the river, about a mile away, where, in a secluded spot, they splashed about in the cool water to their hearts'



content. They remained in for about two hours, and then sat about on the bank, talking over various matters. Jim Lane and Mort Davis had not gone swimming, and Pete and Aleck left in a short time, so there remained on the river bank only Jack, Nat, Sam and Bony.

"Well, thought any more about camping?" asked Sam, as he laid back luxuriously on the grass, and gazed up at the blue sky. "We want to get busy if we're going."

"I know a good place," said Jack. "I just happened to think of it."

"Where is it?" demanded Nat.

"Down on the Long Island shore. I was there once with dad, on an excursion, and I saw several camping parties."

"Aw, we don't want to go where there are lots of others, Jack," objected Bony. "Let's get off in a place by ourselves."

"Sure," chimed in Nat.

"There are plenty of secluded spots there," went on Jack. "I think I can locate a good one. We could set the tent up in the woods, near the ocean, and we'd have the advantages of both. It will be bully sport, boating, bathing, sailing, fishing —"

"Quit it!" cried Sam. "I'm anxious to go."



Don't talk any more about it. Do something!"

"I will!" exclaimed Jack. "I'll write to-night to a man I know down there, and get him to arrange matters. We can be camping in a week if everything goes well."

"What's the name of the place?" asked Sam.

"It's near Sickonsonnett," replied Jack.

"Must be named after an Indian," observed Nat.

"A whole tribe of Indians," added Sam. "But that doesn't matter. Get busy Jack, I'm tired of a civilized life. I want to get back to nature."

"Come on back to the house then," proposed Jack. "I'll get my writing materials out. It's getting most supper time anyhow. Come on, Nat."

"No, thanks, I've got to go home. I haven't been there since morning, and the folks will be wondering where I am. Much obliged. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Come over to-night," invited Jack. "We'll talk more about camp, and decide who's going, and what we'll need."

"All right," agreed Nat, beginning to dress, an example followed by the other lads.

They were almost finished when they heard the puffing of a motor boat coming up the river.



"Who's got a putter-craft around here, Jack?" asked Sam, struggling into his shirt.

"Blessed if I know. Didn't know there was one. The river isn't very deep above here, and it doesn't pay to have a motor boat. Must be somebody from down Haddonville way," for the river broadened as it approached that town.

A little later the craft came in sight around a bend in the stream. The boys stared curiously at it, but their attention was soon taken from the boat itself, by a sight of the two occupants of it.

"Gasoleneous geology!" exclaimed Nat in a low voice. "Will you look who's in it!"

"Jerry Chowden!" cried Jack.

"Yes, and that Lavine fellow you hit with the ball," added Sam. "Maybe they're looking for you, Jack."

"Well, I'm right here," replied our hero calmly. "I'll not run away," and he stood gazing at the passing boat.

But Lavine and Jerry evidently had no intention of making any trouble for Jack or his chums then. They never even glanced at the group of boys on the bank, but stared straight ahead, Lavine attending to the engine of the boat, while Jerry steered.

"I wonder how he got back here so soon?"



asked Jack. "Didn't we see him heading for the station?"

"He probably caught the twelve forty-seven train to Haddonville, and came back in the boat," said Nat. "It's only a short run, less than eight miles on the river. But I never knew Tom Adams's uncle had a motor boat."

"Me either," said Sam. "If he had you can bet Tom would have boasted of it at school. More likely that's Lavine's boat, but I wonder how Jerry came to get in with him?"

"Birds of a feather eat out of the same drinking trough," quoted Bony, getting his proverbs all mixed up.

"I guess that's it," admitted Jack dryly. "But I don't know that it concerns us. Come on, let's hurry home. Aunt Angelina will be sure to have something good for supper. She loves to cook."

"And I know somebody who loves to eat," added Sam with a grin.

The boys were almost ready to proceed, when from up the river, which took quite a turn just above the swimming hole, there sounded a loud explosion.

"What's that?" cried Nat.

"The motor boat! Maybe it's blown up!" cried Jack, starting in the direction of the sound.



The boys raced off after him, taking a short cut across the meadows to where they could see a cloud of black smoke arising. As they ran they could hear excited shouts.

"That's Chowden yelling," remarked Sam, as he hurried along beside Jack.

"Maybe they're hurt," suggested Nat. "Hurry up!"

Bony Balmore, by virtue of his long legs, was in the lead. He looked back, as he neared the river bank and shouted:

"She's on fire, fellows! Come on!"

A moment later the other three boys beheld a startling scene. The motor boat, in which was Jerry Chowden and Jonas Lavine, was all ablaze, and the two occupants were in the stern, crouching down as low as possible to escape the flames. Fortunately the craft was headed toward shore, the opposite bank from that on which the boys were.

"Let's jump in and save 'em," proposed Nat, always ready for an act of bravery.

"It wouldn't do any good," remarked Jack coolly, taking in the situation with a glance. "They'll be ashore in a few seconds and if you tried to swim in that water you might get burned. The gasoline is likely to spread any moment."



Hardly had he spoken when there sounded another explosion, and a sheet of fire appeared on the river. The engine of the boat, which had been chug-chugging away, in spite of the accident, now stopped. But the craft had momentum enough to reach the bank, into the soft mud of which, a moment later, the nose of the boat was poked.

"Jump!" the boys heard Lavine say, and he and Jerry leaped.

The boat, relieved of its load, and urged outward by the impulse given it when the occupants jumped, floated out to the middle of the river. There the current caught it, and began to carry it down stream. It was now completely wrapped in flames, and beyond saving.

"There goes a fine boat," remarked Sam. "It's a pity."

"Jerry and Lavine seem to be all right," said Jack. "Want any help?" he called across the river, which was narrow at this point. Jack would not withhold aid, even from his worst enemy, at a time like this. But neither Lavine nor Jerry returned an answer. They gave one look back at the burning boat, which was now sunk to the gunwale, and then they started across the meadows, away from the river.

"They don't seem much worried," observed



Nat. "It looks as if they came up here on purpose to wreck the boat."

The four chums gazed after the retreating forms of the two, who were hurrying away, when, from a little clump of trees, on the farther side of the stream, located about three hundred feet from where Jerry and Lavine then stood, there stepped a man. The setting sun appeared from behind a cloud just then, and, in the strong light the four chums could see that the newcomer had a shock of red hair, and a mustache to match. He looked first at the group surrounding Jack, and then at the two who had just escaped from the burning boat. Then he raised his voice in a shout.

Lavine turned quickly, gazed at the man a moment, and, then started back toward him on the run. The four boys saw him hand the fiery-headed individual a package, speak to him a few seconds, and then, with a gesture of caution, Lavine turned and rejoined Jerry.

The red-headed man hastily slipped the package under his coat, looked around as if to see if any one besides the four boys was observing him, and then he started off across the fields, in an opposite direction to that taken by Lavine and Jerry.

"Say," remarked Jack, when the red-headed man had disappeared behind a clump of trees,



"did we really see that, or am I dreaming?"

"Oh, it happened all right," declared Nat, "but what it means is more than I can fathom. Tumbling tadpoles! What's up?"

"It looks as Lavine and Jerry came up here to meet that man," said Sam, "and as if the accident to the boat didn't make any difference to them."

"That red-headed fellow was certainly waiting for them," was Jack's opinion, "and Lavine handed him a package which the man seems to be very particular about. However, I don't know that it concerns us, so we might as well go back home. Hello!" he added quickly. "The motor boat's gone."

"Sunk very likely," spoke Nat. "The river's deep here. Maybe we could raise it and fix it up."

"I don't believe so," said Sam. "That man probably wouldn't let you in the first place, and, if he did, the engine is probably all burned out. Too bad, for it was a neat little craft."

Vainly speculating on the meaning of the scene they had just witnessed, but never thinking that it was soon to play a part in their lives, and discussing the incidents of the burning boat, the boys started for Jack's house. Nat left them to go to his own home, promising to come over in the evening and talk camp.



There was quite a session in the loft over Jack's barn that evening, and details of camping out were discussed at length. Jack wrote to a man he knew in Sickonsonnett, and then it was decided to go ahead and get their camping outfit ready, in anticipation of a favorable answer.

This took them the next few days, and when a reply did come, stating that Jack's friend had picked out a fine site, in the woods, near the seashore, and away from all other camps, the boys lost no time in completing their preparations.

"We'll start the first thing Monday morning," said Jack, when everything possible, including the tent and cots, had been sent on ahead. "Now for a glorious time, fellows. Nothing but sport and fun for the next six weeks!"

The boys were down to the freight depot, seeing to the shipping of their camping stuff, when Fathead Farson spied Jack. He had heard of the proposed trip.

"Oh Jack," he began, "can't I go along? I'll pay my way, and my share of the camping expenses."

"What! Go camping with us, Fathead?"

"Don't call me that, Jack, please," pleaded the town nuisance.

"Well, Archibald —"



"That's worse."

"Well, Archie, do you think you could cook to suit us?"

"Cook?" and a blank look came over the chuckle-headed lad's countenance.

"Yes, cook. We need a cook, as the one we hired has left."

"I — I can cook beans," said Fathead.

"Yes, and I s'pose you can boil water without burning it," added Nat. "Keep on and you'll be a French chef before you know it. I'm afraid, Fathead, that you couldn't suit our critical tastes."

The lad saw that he was being made fun of, and he got angry.

"All right," he declared. "I'll go anyhow. I've got an aunt who lives at the seashore, near where you're going, and I'll go visiting her. That will be better than camping."

"Of course it will," spoke Sam, "and then you can be sure to get your nursing bottle fresh every night."

"I'll — I'll punch your face!" cried Fathead in a rage, but Jack and his chums moved off without giving him a chance to carry out his threat.

"I wonder if his aunt does live anywhere near the place where we are going to camp?" asked Nat.



"Somewhere down there," replied Jack. "But don't worry. If Fathead comes around butting-in, and bothering us, I think I can make him wish he hadn't. Hello, there's Budge Rankin."

As he spoke a lad approached from around the corner of the freight house. He was walking slowly along, chewing a big wad of gum, and, now and then, pulling a part of it out as far as his arm would go, and then getting it into his mouth again by winding it around his long tongue.

"Hello, Budge!" called Jack.

"'Lo," was the laconic reply.

"Doing anything this vacation?" asked Jack.

"Notanawfulot," mumbled Budge, the gum interfering somewhat with his enunciation.

"He means not an awful lot I suppose," murmured Bony. "Budge is a time saver when it comes to words."

"Whatchudoin'?" asked Budge, starting to pull the gum out in a long string.

"We're getting ready to go camping," said Jack, "and it just occurred to me maybe you'd like to go along."

"'Smatter? Ain'tchugotnuff?" inquired the odd lad.

"Yes, we've got enough to make up a party, but we could take one more."



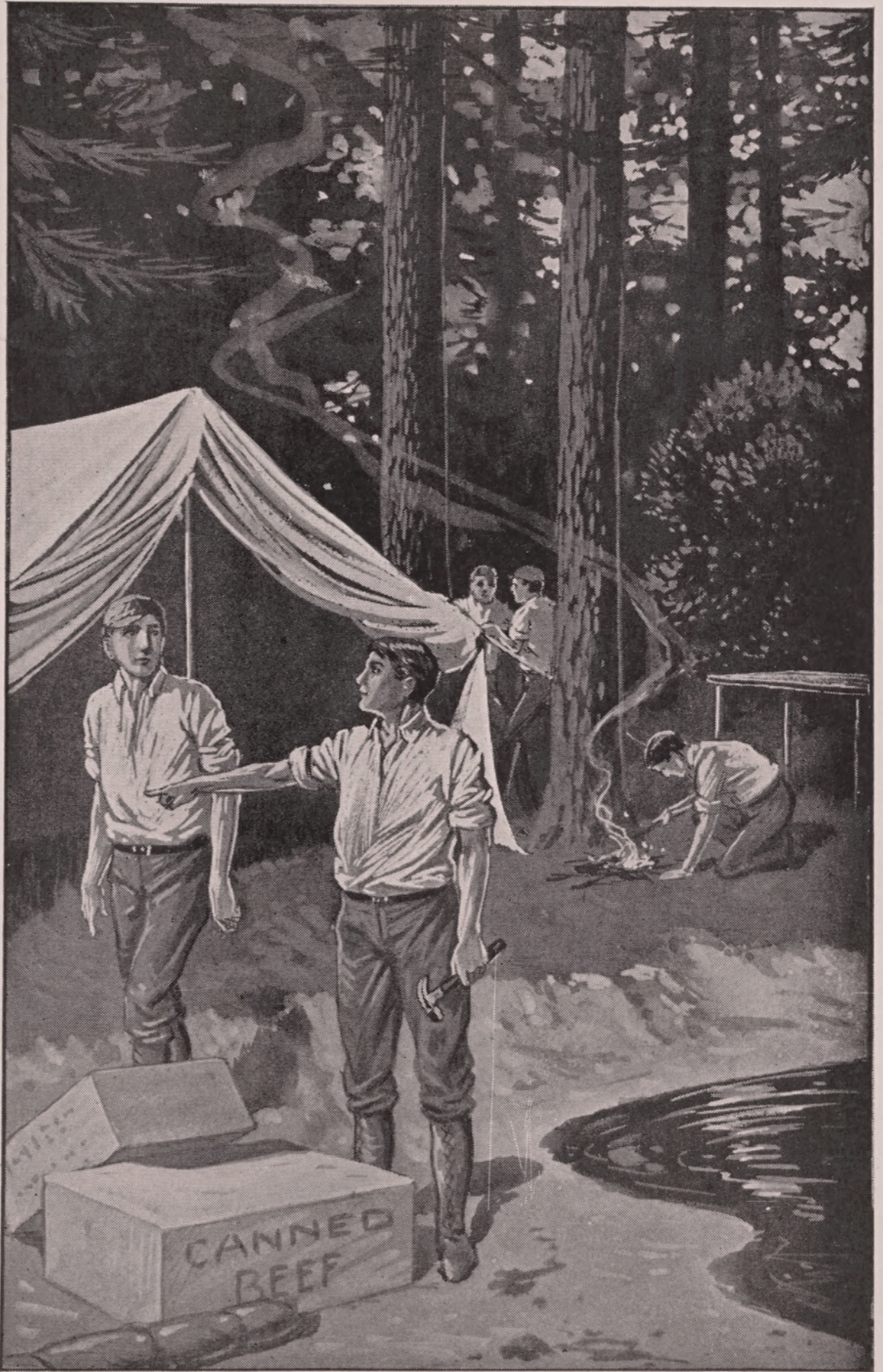
"Money's too scarce."

"You won't need any money," replied Jack. "I was thinking of paying you a small salary, if you wanted to go along, to help about camp. You can cook some, wash up the dishes, and look after the place while we're away. Want to come?"

"Better life," replied Budge, and that settled it as far as he was concerned.

Jack had previously spoken to his chums of this plan, and they had agreed to it. So it was arranged, and the next Monday morning Jack, Nat, Sam, Bony and Budge started for camp. Aleck Dawes and Pete Ruggles could not go just then but they promised they might come later and join their chums.





“Under Jack’s direction matters began to shape themselves  
into order”







## CHAPTER X

### AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

JACK and his friends found that an ideal camping spot had been selected for them by Mr. Skidmore, to whom our hero had written. It was in rather a lonely spot, but this just suited the boys, for when they went camping they really wanted to camp out and not pretend to do so.

There was a clump of pines near the spot selected for them, and back of the beach was quite a grove of trees, rather wild and lonely, but liked all the better on that account. The tent was put up just on the edge of the beach, where there would be plenty of shade, yet where the sun would reach it part of the day.

"This is certainly a dandy place!" exclaimed Bony when he had surveyed it from his superior height. "Jack, you're all right; which I believe I have remarked before."

"Those noble sentiments do you credit, sir, a great deal of credit, sir," remarked Sam pompously, in imitation of Dr. Mead.



"Mystifying mouse traps! cut it out and get busy on getting the camp into shape," interrupted Nat.

"Yes, if we're going to sleep in the tent to-night, it ought to be up," added Jack. "Come on, Budge, you and I will show these fellows how to do things."

The tent and other things had been brought from a distant railroad station by Mr. Skidmore, and were piled in rather a confused heap on the beach.

"Camping is lots of work, as well as fun," spoke Bony with a sigh, as he noted all there was to be done.

But under Jack's direction matters began to shape themselves into order. The tent was soon up and strongly guyed against possible wind storms. Then the cooking tent, a small affair was set up, for the boys had brought along a gasoline stove, thinking that for so large a party to depend on a campfire was too uncertain. Cots were set up, the baggage arranged in order, and then the boys began to look about them.

Their camp was on the beach of a sort of sheltered cove, where there was no surf, consequently a boat could easily be launched. But it was only a short row to the ocean proper. Not far away



there was a river which flowed into the ocean, and thus they had the choice of three kinds of fishing, the still water of the bay, the open sea and the river, while for bathing and swimming there was an equal variety. They had hired a couple of big, safe boats from Mr. Skidmore, and these were now on the beach, out of reach of the high tide.

"Me for a good swim!" announced Sam, when, after a couple of hours of hard work the camp began to look like something.

"And me for a good eat," sighed Bony. "I say Jack, are you going to put us on a diet? I haven't seen so much as a ham sandwich since we arrived."

"I guess we can call it half a day's work and knock off a bit," replied Jack. "Budge, set out the repast, that my lords and gentlemen may dine."

"Sure's you're a foot'igh," answered Budge solemnly, and he proceeded to unpack some good things from the stores.

It did not take him long to arrange a satisfying, if not very stylish, meal. Meanwhile the four lads had gone for a dip in the bay, and came back rosy and tingling with health, and possessing appetites "that would make a millionaire dyspeptic feel like a two year old colt just turned out to pasture," as Sam expressed it. They ate heart-



ily and then, after a rest beneath the pines, which exhaled a grateful odor, they finished up the work of making camp.

"I guess Pete and Aleck are wishing they were with us," remarked Nat, as he lolled on the warm sand, clad only in his bathing suit.

"That's right," agreed Jack. "But they may be along in a week or two."

They went fishing the next morning, and had fair luck, and, in the afternoon, rowed up the river for a mile or more. The camp was now in good shape, and when the four went away Budge remained behind to guard it from possible prowling tramps.

Several days passed in this enjoyable manner, the boys finding new delights at every turn. Mr. Skidmore came over once or twice to see if they wanted anything, but the lads were used to relying on themselves, and they knew how to camp.

One afternoon, when they were lolling about the tent on the beach, Jack gave a sudden exclamation.

"What's the matter; sand flea after you?" asked Sam.

"No, but here comes that snip, Fathead. Now take your cues from me, and we'll have some fun with him. You all pretend to be asleep."



Gentle snores from Jack's chums, including Budge, indicated that they had fallen in with his trick. Fathead Farson came strolling up the beach. He had come to pay his aunt a visit, and, learning where the Denton boys were camped, had decided to pay them a call, to show them that he, too, could come to the seashore.

"Hello, Jack," he called, as soon as he was close to the tent.

"I beg pardon," replied Jack drawlingly, as he looked at Fathead.

"I said hello," repeated Archie, twisting his flabby lips into what he meant to be a smile, but which was only a grin.

"I think you have the advantage of me, my dear chap," spoke Jack tantalizingly. "I haven't the honor of your acquaintance; really I haven't."

"Aw go on," said Fathead. "Quit your foolin' Jack. You know me. I'm Archie Farson."

"Archie — Archie — Ah, I presume you mean Archibald."

"Aw, don't call me that; please don't."

"Why I don't intend to call you anything. I don't know you," spoke Jack, looking at Fathead as if he were the veriest stranger.

"Aw, quit yer foolin'" urged the nuisance. "You know me. So do all the fellows. So this



is where you're camping; eh? I told you I'd find you."

"Do you mean to tell me any of these gentlemen know you?" asked Jack, as if in amazement.

"Course. There's Nat Anderson, and Sam Chalmers and Bony Balmore and Budge Rankin."

"It seems to me you are very familiar with the names of these friends of mine," spoke Jack coldly.

"I will prove that you are in error, and that none of them know you."

He gently shook Nat by the shoulder.

"Do you know — er — this person?" he asked in an affected drawl. Nat, who had "caught-on" to Jack's trick, opened his eyes, and looked at Fat-head.

"Certainly I don't know him," he said.

"Why Nat!" exclaimed Archie. "Of course you know me."

"Don't know you from Adam," went on Nat. "Mulligan's molasses barrel! Who is he, anyway, Jack?"

"I don't know. Perhaps Budge knows him."

Budge was awakened, and, entering into the joke, replied to Jack's question:

"I'dknowimatall."

"Why Budge Rankin!" exclaimed Archie.

"Just to prove how much you are in error I



will awaken these other two gentlemen," went on Jack. "After that I hope you will trespass no further on our time."

In turn Sam and Bony, without a smile on their face, declared that Archie was a total stranger to them, which, in fact he was, since they had only seen him since arriving in Denton, and only really knew him by Jack's account.

"You see," spoke Jack triumphantly, "you are mistaken. None of us know you."

Fathead did not know what to make of it. He knew it was some joke Jack had arranged, but he was not bright enough to fathom it.

"Don't you know me?" he pleaded, wondering if he had so changed in appearance that he was unrecognizable.

"Do we know him?" asked Jack, turning to his chums.

"We don't know him!" they replied in a sing-song chorus, and then they turned over on their backs and pretended to go to sleep.

"They don't know you!" chanted Jack. "They know you not — you not — know you not! They know you not! Not! Not!Not!"

"Don't! Don't!" pleaded Archie, not knowing what to make of his reception. "Please don't! You know me, Jack!"



"I know you not! I know you not! Know you! Know you! You! You! You! Not! Not! No! N—o—No! N! N! N! O! O! O!" and with that comic opera effect, Jack, too, turned over and closed his eyes.

Fathead, puzzled and alarmed, hurried off up the beach, never once looking back at the lads who had given him such a peculiar greeting.

"There, I guess that will detain him for a short space of time," remarked Jack, as he sat up.

"The idea of him butting-in here! He's a regular nuisance."

After supper that night they went for a moonlight row on the bay, and in the morning Sam proposed that they go up the river fishing.

"I think it will be more fun to try the bay," suggested Jack. "The weak fish are running well now, and they make good eating."

"There are fine fat crabs in the river," declared Sam. "I love crab salad. Can you make it, Budge?"

"'FIgithcrabs," was the guarded answer, while Budge carefully selected a fresh piece of chewing gum.

"Of course," admitted Sam. "Well, I'll get some."

As Jack and Sam could not agree it was arranged



that Sam and Bony would row up the river, while Jack and Nat went to try their luck in the bay. They had two boats, and the party could be thus divided, leaving Budge in camp, where he was content to loll on the sand until the boys returned.

As it happened either the weak fish were not running well, or Jack and Nat did not know how to catch them, for, after two hours spent in the boat, under the hot sun, they decided to return to camp.

"I hope Sam and Bony have some luck," remarked Jack.

"So do I," agreed Nat. "We're pretty rank fishermen I guess."

"It was the fault of the fish," said Jack, as if that settled it.

They found Sam and his chum had not returned yet, and they set Budge to work getting a meal of canned things, for it was getting close to dinner time.

"Here they come," announced Nat at length, as he looked up, and saw a boat, containing the two boys, coming down the shore from the direction of the river.

"They're rowing fast, too," added Jack. "They must have had some luck."

"Did you get any?" asked Nat, as the boys came within hailing distance.



"A few," replied Sam shortly, and his manner was so strange that Jack remarked:

"Something must have happened."

He hurried down to where Sam and Bony were pulling their boat up on the beach.

"Why you got quite a few crabs," he said, looking into the basket in the bottom of the boat.

"What's the matter? Did you get hurt, or have any bad luck?"

"Not exactly," answered Sam, "but we saw some one we didn't expect to see."

"Where?"

"In the woods."

"Who was it?"

"Hemp Smith!" was Sam's unexpected answer. "Bony and I spied him just as we were getting ready to come back to camp."

"Did he see you?" inquired Jack eagerly, for he had heard nothing of Marinello Booghoobally, the pretended mystic-worker, since the former term at school, when Hemp tried to play a mean trick on our hero, but which Jack turned so that he foiled a plot of the sharper, and got back a diamond the rascal had secured.

"I think he did," replied Sam. "He knows me you know, from having seen me with you, and



as soon as he had a glimpse of me, he, and the chap with him, started off through the woods."

"Who was with him?" inquired Jack eagerly.

"I'm not sure, but I think it was that Lavine man."

"What, Jonas Lavine? The fellow I hit with the ball?"

"I'm pretty sure it was him," went on Sam.

"Then they're up to some game," decided Jack.

"Two such scoundrels as they are don't go strolling through the woods together for nothing. Boys, there's something up, and we'd better be on the lookout!"



## CHAPTER XI

### JERRY SURPRISES LAVINE

JACK's announcement, made with much seriousness, rather startled his chums. They saw that he was disturbed over something.

"What do you think is up?" asked Sam.

"I don't exactly know," was Jack's reply.

"Do you think Lavine is after you because that ball hit him?" inquired Nat.

"Hardly. But it certainly seems odd for Hemp Smith to be in this vicinity. I never knew him to show up around where I was without something happening. I'll wager it does this time, too."

"Well, I'm pretty sure it was Lavine and Hemp," went on Sam. "They disappeared so quickly when they had caught a glimpse of us, though, that I couldn't be certain."

"JuknowwhatI'do?" asked Budge suddenly, for he had been listening to the talk.

"What would you do?" inquired Jack, for he knew that sometimes his odd friend had good ideas.



"I'd take a walk in the woods near where those men were," went on Budge, removing his gum from his mouth, and speaking slowly, as befitted the seriousness of the subject.

"That's a good idea," declared Sam. "Come on, we can row back there in less than an hour."

"Stay! Pause, rash youth!" interrupted Nat. "Would'st venture on another journey half famished as we are? Let us dine first."

"That's another good idea," said Jack. "Budge, hustle up the grub, or, as my friend Nat would say; 'set out a small repast for these hungry mortals.' Then we'll take a look at the place where our mysterious friends were."

Little time was lost over the meal, and early in the afternoon the boys, in their two boats, were rowing up the river. They disembarked at a spot pointed out by Sam.

"Here's where we saw them," he said, indicating the place. "They were right near this dead oak tree, and they went off in that direction. We lost sight of them almost at once."

"That's rather odd," remarked Jack thoughtfully.

"What is?"

"Losing sight of them so soon. From where you stood you ought to have been able to see them



for quite a distance. The woods are open in all directions."

"You're right, Jack!" exclaimed Bony. "I thought there was something queer about it."

"About what?"

"The way they disappeared. They seemed to vanish all of a sudden, as though they stepped into a hollow or got behind a big tree. I remember now I remarked that at the time, but Sam was so excited over recognizing Hemp Smith, that neither of us gave a thought to the odd manner in which the men disappeared."

Jack did not reply. Instead he darted forward and began to look over the ground near where the two men had stood.

"Nothing out of the way here," he said, with rather a disappointed air.

"What did you expect to find?" asked Nat.

"I thought there might have been some sort of a hollow where they hid until you were out of the way, but there doesn't seem to be any. There's something odd about it, just the same."

"There is that," admitted Sam. "They did disappear quite mysteriously."

"Hello!" exclaimed Nat suddenly. "Here's a bunch of horse hair that some bird gathered for a nest, and forgot to use," and he plucked some-



thing from a low bush and held it up for the inspection of his chums.

"Horse hair?" asked Jack. "Did you ever see a horse with red hair like that —"

He stopped, as though a new idea had come to him, and took the hair from Nat.

"The red-headed man!" he cried. "Look, fellows, this is the exact color of his hair."

"So it is," declared Nat. "I never thought of that. The red-haired man who met Lavine and Jerry in the meadow when the boat blew up! He's been here!"

"Are you sure neither of the men you saw had red hair?" asked Jack of Sam and Bony.

"Sure," they replied, while Sam added: "Hemp's hair is as black as a coal, and it hasn't changed any since I last saw him. I'm sure he was one of the two."

Jack shook his head. Something baffled him, but he did not want to speak of a certain idea that was in his mind, until he had investigated a little further. Nothing more was to be gained by remaining in the woods, and the boys rowed leisurely back to camp, talking meanwhile over the rather strange happening.

For a few days after that, including Sunday, nothing unusual occurred. The boys enjoyed the



boating, bathing and fishing, afforded by the waters about their camp, and they spent considerable time resting in the shade, telling stories and recalling boarding school days.

"This is just the time for a little row out on Old Briny," announced Jack one morning, as he peered out of the tent, and saw how calm the bay was. "There's no wind, and there can't be much of a swell on. The last time we went outside it was a bit too rough. What do you fellows say to a row outside?"

"I'm with you," replied Sam. "Maybe we can catch some blue fish."

"Youghtercatchsomething," spoke Budge quickly, as he arose to get the breakfast.

"Why had we?" inquired Nat.

"Ain't nothin' much t' eat here," was Budge's answer, as he inserted a fresh wad of gum.

"That's so, Mr. Skidmore is to bring us a supply of provisions to-day," said Jack. "I saw that the cupboard was getting low, and I wrote to him to fetch some grub over. It'll be here to-day, Budge, so if we don't catch any fish we'll not starve."

"That's good," was all Budge replied, as he set the teakettle on the gasoline stove to boil.

It was a good thing Jack had ordered a supply



of edibles as the boys only caught one bluefish, and a small one at that. As they started back toward camp, having thoroughly enjoyed the row on the ocean, which was almost as calm as the proverbial mill-pond, they heard the puffing of a motor boat off to one side.

"Wish we had one of those," said Jack. "Next time I come camping I'm going to have one. This rowing is too much like work."

"Good idea," answered Bony. "You can have my vote for a putter-craft."

As he turned to look at the motor boat which was approaching, he gave a start, and called in a low voice to his chums:

"Look who's in it."

"Jerry Chowden and Tom Adams," said Jack. "Well if that isn't the limit! They seem to be following us."

The motor craft was approaching closer. Then came a shrill whistle from it, and Jerry's taunting voice cried out:

"Get off our course or we'll run you down!"

"You'd better try it," fired back Jack. "We have the right of way, and if you try to ram us you'll get the worst of it!"

"Aw, don't think you can scare us," added Tom. "Is that your camp over there?" and he pointed



to where the white tent of the boys could be seen on the beach.

"Yes, it is, but if we catch either of you fellows around there we'll throw you into the bay," said Sam, who had a feeling of enmity of long standing against both Jerry and Tom.

"No danger. We don't care enough for your society to call on you," cried Jerry. "Look out now. I'm going to cross there. Stop rowing or I'll ram you."

"We'll not stop rowing," retorted Nat. "The ocean is wide enough for you to pass us without coming anywhere near us. If you do I'll jab this boathook into you," and he caught up a long, sharp one.

"That's the idea," declared Sam, taking another. "If you come near enough to us, Jerry, we'll make fast and we'll give you the dandiest licking you ever had. We've turned pirates since we came here," he added in savage glee, "and we don't care what we do. We'd just as lief put a hole in you as not."

"Keep off! Don't go too close," the boys could hear Tom Adams begging. He was a worse coward than Jerry.

"Aw, who's afraid?" asked his crony, but the boys noticed that Jerry shifted the steering wheel



so as to send the motor boat a safe distance away from the rowing craft, and out of reach of the long boathooks.

"Tom and Jerry must be camping somewhere around here," remarked Jack, when the two bullies were beyond hearing distance.

"Looks like it," admitted Sam.

"It's too bad," added Nat. "We can't have any fun if they're within ten miles. We always seem to be meeting them."

"I guess they'll give us a wide berth after this," was Jack's opinion. "They evidently did not expect to find us here. This locality seems to be a favorite one for people we don't like. There's Lavine, Hemp Smith, Fathead Farson, and now Jerry Chowden and Tom Adams."

"Yes, the Board of Health ought to be notified," remarked Bony solemnly, whereat his chums laughed.

They reached camp, to find that Mr. Skidmore had brought a plentiful supply of food, part of which Budge had cooking for a late dinner.

If Jack and his friends could have witnessed a scene which took place shortly after this, they would have been more surprised than ever, over what seemed a strange coincidence. For Jerry Chowden, and his crony, having taken their motor



boat to a cove about ten miles from where our friends were camped, went ashore. There Jerry met Jonas Lavine, who seemed to be waiting for him.

"Did you bring the paper?" asked Lavine.

"Yes; here it is," replied Jerry, passing over a flat bundle. "But I brought something else, too."

"What is it?"

"Information."

His manner rather startled Lavine, who asked:

"What's the matter? Are the police —"

He stopped in some confusion.

"We met Jack Ranger and some of his chums on our way here. They are camped near Sickonsonnett, on the beach."

"Jack Ranger, camped near here!" exclaimed Lavine. "Are you sure?"

"Positive; aren't we Tom?"

"Sure."

"Ranger camped near here," murmured Jonas Lavine, clearly made uneasy by the news. "I wonder if he can be spying on me?" he added in a low voice.



## CHAPTER XII

### A STRANGE DISCOVERY

"WHO's for a swimming race?" called Jack that same afternoon, when, following a substantial meal, the campers had been stretched out in the shade for some time. "I feel like splashing about in the water, and the tide's just right."

"I'm with you," declared Sam, beginning to take off his shoes. "First out to the channel buoy wins!"

This was a red and black spar, anchored on a sand bar in the channel. The boys had built a small float of trees, which they cut down in the woods, and they used this as a place from which to dive. Soon Jack, Sam, Bony and Nat were standing on the float, clad in their bathing suits, all poised for a plunge.

"Aren't you coming, Budge?" called Jack.

"Stooeasylyinhere," replied Budge from where he reclined under a tree, calmly chewing gum.

"He's always looking for something easy,"



commented Sam. "Come on, fellows, one, two, three! Go!"

Four bodies sprang as one from the float, and splashed into the water. Eight arms began sweeping the sun-lit wavelets and eight legs kicked vigorously out, each lad determined to be first at the spar buoy.

Jack won, but by a narrow margin, for Bony, in spite of his thin structure, was a fast swimmer, and he was only half a length behind our hero.

"Now back again!" cried Sam, who, though not so fast as his chum, was good for a long distance.

"Not for mine. I'm going to rest a bit," declared Nat. He clung to the buoy, letting his body float lazily in the warm water.

The others splashed about, Sam fetching a long reach under the surface, for he could hold his breath a most astonishing length of time. They remained in the water for nearly an hour and then raced back to shore, Bony winning this time, to even things up. They found Budge busy getting a meal, for this was a task at which the odd lad did not spare himself. He was a regular jewel to take camping, Jack said.

They spent that evening rowing on the bay, and planned for the next day to make a trip up the



river after crabs, for Sam had set his heart on some salad made from the crustaceans, and on the former trip he and Bony had not had very good luck.

They started off in the two boats the next morning, leaving Budge in camp, where he was quite content to stay, chewing gum and reclining in the shade. They took along some meat to tie on the end of strings for bait, and long-handled nets, to scoop up the crabs when they grabbed the bait in their claws.

"I've got one!" cried Sam, pulling cautiously on his cord, after they had been fishing for half an hour. "He's a beaut too!"

But alas for his luck! Either he was not quick enough, or the crab was a wary old resident of the river, for there came a loud splash and Mr. Crab dropped back into the water, while a look of the deepest disappointment came over Sam's face.

But that seemed the end of their bad luck, for, from then on the boys caught several of the shellfish — enough to insure plenty of salad.

"I'm going for a stroll in the woods," announced Jack at length. "I've got enough crabs. Coming fellows?"

"I'll go," said Nat, who was in the same boat with Jack.



"The crabbing is too good to miss," replied Sam. "When the tide turns they won't be here. I haven't half enough yet."

"If you eat half what you've caught you'll have to have a doctor," retorted Jack. "Come on then, Nat. We'll leave those fellows to clean the river of crabs."

"Where are you going?" asked Nat, when he and Jack were ashore.

"No place in particular. I just thought I'd look about and see if I could catch sight of Hemp Smith or Lavine."

Jack strolled idly on. He had no idea that he would see either of the men, who seemed to be so mysteriously involved in his affairs, yet he could not help thinking how strange it was that they should have been seen in these woods, and together. He more than half hoped that he would catch a glimpse of them.

"Well, going much farther?" asked Nat, when Jack had walked on for perhaps half a mile, without speaking.

"No, I guess not," was the reply. "Might as well go back."

He turned, and stood looking at a bird of brilliant plumage that was perched on a branch near him. Nat, too, was looking at the feathered



creature. Then, all at once, the boys were aware that someone was approaching through the woods. They could hear the sound of footsteps, and of twigs and branches being broken as the advance was made.

"Somebody's coming," whispered Jack.

"Sure," answered Nat cautiously. "I wonder —"

He said nothing more, for at that instant they both saw, through an opening between the trees, two men, who were walking cautiously across the trail the boys had just left. And one of the men was Jonas Lavine, while the other was Hemp Smith.

"Come on," whispered Jack.

"Where?"

"We'll follow them and see where they go. There's something going on, or they wouldn't be here again. Go easy now."

He had spoken in a whisper. The men were not aware of the presence of the boys. Jack and Nat were adapting at progressing without making a sound, for, more than once, they had made their escape from the dormitory at Washington Hall when orders were strict that no one should go out, and they had often gone hunting, when their success depended on their quietness. Consequently



they were able to trail after Hemp Smith and Lavine without the men being aware of it.

The men soon came out on what seemed to be a new path made through the woods, and taking care not to get too close, the boys kept after them. Suddenly Jack, who was in the lead, held up a warning hand. Nat knew what that meant, and he crouched down, close to the ground, as he saw his chum do. Nor were they a moment too soon, for the two men turned and scanned the trail over which they had just come. The boys could hear the murmur of voices.

The sounds ceased. Then came a rustle of bushes. Jack waited a few moments, not daring to raise his head to look. When he did he stared in astonishment about him, for the men had disappeared, though the trail, which was straight for some distance ahead, showed no signs of them. The men had utterly vanished, almost before the very eyes of the boys!

"They're gone," spoke Nat.

"Yes, just like the day when Sam and Bony saw them," added his chum. "There's something queer around here, and I'm going to find out what it is."

He rose to his feet, and stood in a listening attitude. No sound, save the wind in the trees, or



the calls of distant birds, came to them. The woods were silent.

Then, with a suddenness that was startling, there was heard, almost at the very feet of the boys, a rumbling sound. The ground seemed to vibrate slightly.

"What's that? An earthquake?" asked Nat, in some fear.

Jack shook his head. Clearly he was puzzled. The rumbling increased, and the ground trembled more. Then, from a little clump of stones, off to the left, a small cloud of vapor arose.

"A volcano! Tommy cods to tom cats!" exclaimed Nat. "We're over a volcano!"

"Easy!" cautioned Jack, for Nat had spoken aloud.

Jack walked softly over to the stones, whence the cloud of vapor arose. He bent down over them. Then he sniffed the air vigorously. He had made a startling discovery.



## CHAPTER XIII

### AN UNDERGROUND PRINTING PLANT

"WHAT is it?" asked Nat anxiously.

Jack did not answer. He beckoned for his chum to join him. Nat, as silent as a cat, walked from a path on which he had remained standing, and came to where the group of stones were, with the faint cloud of vapor curling upward.

"Smell," whispered Jack. Nat did so.

"What is it?" asked his chum.

"Gasolene."

"That's right. What else do you smell?"

Nat took another deep sniff.

"It smells like — like — um — er — like the office of the *Weekly Gazette*, in Denton," he answered. "Like a printing place."

"And that's what it is," declared Jack. "It's an underground printing plant, as sure as you're a foot high."

"But what in the world are they doing with a printing plant out here in the woods? And where did Lavine and Hemp Smith disappear to?"



"Those are questions, Nat, which require considerable studying over before they can be answered. The main point is that we have discovered something."

"But what does it all mean?"

"That I don't know, but I'm going to before very long."

"Petrified printers' ink!" exclaimed Nat. "Who would have thought it? Maybe Lavine and Hemp Smith are down there!"

"'Down there' implies some sort of an underground place," went on Jack. "We have only begun to discover things, Nat. As soon as I smelled the fumes of gasoline I knew it must be an engine, run by that power, which was making the vapor. My nose confirmed my belief. That was what caused the rumbling and the shaking of the ground. You can feel it plainer here."

Nat noticed that this was so. There seemed to be a miniature earthquake in progress underneath where they stood.

"And when I caught the smell of printers' ink, I knew what I was up against," went on Jack. "This is the chimney to their underground place. This is a hole in the cave in which they must be working, and which carries off the smoke and



smells. They have the engine pretty well muffled, or it would make more noise."

"But what in the world do they want with a printing office out here in the woods, and underground?"

"Those are questions which we will have to ask Lavine, Hemp Smith and company," answered Jack. "There's some game on—I'm sure of that. What it is I haven't the least idea, but I'm going to find out. I can understand one thing, however. I know how Hemp and Lavine disappeared so suddenly."

"How?"

"They went into the cave. There must be an entrance somewhere about here. We'll find it too, and then we'll see what they have to say for themselves."

"Maybe it's dangerous."

"Maybe it is, but it won't be the first time we've run into danger; will it, Nat?"

"No. We had our share of it on your western trip."

"I'll get to the bottom of this," declared Jack.

"Which, the cave or the mystery?"

"Both," replied our hero, smiling at Nat's joke.

"Maybe they're printing 'Black-hand' letters out here," suggested Nat.



"They don't need a press for such work as that," replied Jack. "Besides the scoundrels who make use of such threats don't send out enough of their warnings to require a press. No, it's some other game that Lavine and Smith are up to. I wish I knew what it was. But the first thing to do is to find out where the entrance to the cave is."

"Let's take a look around," suggested Nat. "It must be ahead here, for that's where they were when we lost sight of 'em."

"Come on," said Jack suddenly, "we'll find —"

But he ceased speaking suddenly, for the rumbling noise stopped, and the thin cloud of vapor no longer arose from the hole in the ground, around which were piled stones as if in a careless heap.

"Let's get out of here," went on Jack quickly. "They've quit work, and they may be out of their hole any minute. It would never do to be discovered now!"

The two boys made their way back to the path they had left, and turned toward the river. They paused a moment to see if they were followed, but there was no sign of any one coming from the underground printing plant.

"Things are getting worse and worse," said Nat. "Personified paddy-cakes! But who



would have thought we would run into a mystery like this when we went camping."

"It sure is a mystery," agreed Jack, "and it's up to us to solve it."

"Well, why didn't you fellows stay all night?" asked Sam, when Jack and Ned got back to where they had moored their boat in the river.

"That's all right," declared Jack. "Get any crabs?"

"A basketful, and we could have had more. We were just going to look for you. Thought maybe Hemp Smith had carried you off."

"Well, we came near capturing him," put in Nat.

"No! Get out!" exclaimed Sam.

"We made a great discovery," declared Jack.

"We sure did," added Nat.

"Aw, quit you're kidding," advised Bony. "What did you find; a rabbit's nest or a bear's den?"

"We found where Hemp Smith and Jonas Lavine disappeared to," answered Jack, and he told his two chums what he and Nat had discovered.



## CHAPTER XIV

### FATHEAD'S QUEER PIES

FOR a few seconds Sam and Bony did not know whether their chums were fooling them or not. But Jack's serious face indicated that he was very much in earnest.

"Where did you spot them?" asked Bony.

"Back there in the woods. They have a cave under ground and they're running a printing office."

"A printing office?" exclaimed Sam.

"Yes," replied Jack and he proceeded to go into details.

"Let's go back!" proposed Sam. "We four are more than a match for them. We'll find out what they're up to."

"No," said Jack, and he shook his head.

"Why not?" demanded Bony. "Are you afraid?"

"Not much," retorted Jack quickly. "I've put it all over Hemp Smith more than once, and I



guess you saw me knock out Lavine. I'm not afraid."

"Then why don't you go?"

"Because I want to think this over a bit. There's some queer game on, and I want to discover what it is. If we go slap-dash at it we may scare them away, and not find out what's up. If we go slow we can find out what they're doing."

During the row back to camp, the boys talked of nothing but the strange discovery. Jack and Nat had to go over it again, in all the details, before Sam and Bony were satisfied that they had heard it all.

The four chums found Budge in the same attitude as when they had left early that morning. He looked up as they approached the tent, having pulled their boats up on the beach.

"Jumeet Skidmore?" he asked, not pausing in his gum chewing operations.

"No, we didn't meet Mr. Skidmore," answered Jack. "Why?"

"Here's a telegram he brought," went on Budge, taking his gum out, and speaking distinctly, as befitted the importance of the occasion.

"A telegram? Who from?" asked Jack quickly, fearing there was bad news at home.

"Dunno," was all Budge said, but by this time



our hero, seeing that the envelope the odd lad had handed him was addressed to "Mr. Jack Ranger" had torn it open.

"It's from Pete Ruggles and Aleck Dawes," he announced. "They can't come to camp with us."

"Why not?" asked Nat.

"Folks won't let 'em. That's too bad. I was counting on giving those fellows a good time. However, maybe it's just as well. We're likely to have some strenuous times in the next few days if we smoke out Hemp Smith and Company."

A strenuous time indeed was in store for Jack. He had not the slightest inkling of it, or perhaps he would not have been quite so ready to welcome it, as he was at this moment, for the thought of an encounter with his old enemy gave him a thrill of pleasure for the time being.

"Well, Budge," remarked Nat, "I presume you have a meal all ready for us?"

"Soon's I make offee," was the laconic reply, as Budge got up from his restful position, and began to bustle about the cook tent. "Jugitanycrabs?"

"Lots of 'em," answered Sam. "We count on a nice crab salad for supper to-night."

"Then we'd better start 'em to boil," suggested Jack. "We'll put 'em on in a big kettle over a



fire out doors, and all have a hand in it. They're just as good cold boiled, as they are made into a salad."

"Nothing like a salad," declared Sam, who was fond of dainty dishes.

The meal was almost ready, and the boys were anxiously waiting for it, as it was some time past noon, and they were hungry, when, as they were about to dish it up they heard some one approaching the camp.

"Somebody's coming to dinner," said Jack, "Maybe it's Mr. Skidmore, with another telegram."

A moment later the boys beheld emerging from the woods that bordered the beach, the unwelcome form of Fathead Farson.

"Liquified lollypops!" exclaimed Nat under his breath. "If here isn't that nuisance again. We'll have to move our camp to get rid of him."

"Leave it to me," returned Jack in a low voice. Then he went on. "Ah, Archibald, you are just in time."

"Please don't call me Archibald," pleaded the pasty-faced one. "But you know me now, don't you, Jack?"

"Know you? Why of course I do, Fathead —



I mean Archie. Why shouldn't I know you? You have a face not easy to forget."

"But you didn't know me the other time I was here."

"The other time you were here? Why, were you here before?"

"Yes; don't you remember? When you were all asleep and you pretended you didn't know me."

"Why Fat — Archie, you are talking in riddles! You were never here before; was he fellows?"

"Never here before!" chorused the three chums, with serious faces.

"But now that you're here now, for the first time," went on Jack, "won't you stay and have lunch with us?"

Fathead's pasty face took on more of a shine than ever. He was very fond of eating, and his aunt, with whom he was spending his vacation, set a scanty table.

"Of course I'll stay!" he exclaimed. "Where shall I sit, Jack?"

"First you'll have to help us a bit. You don't mind doing a bit of work do you? Very light work?"

"No — no," replied Fathead doubtfully. He



was a little dubious now, that he found there was some condition attached to his eating.

"You're fond of pie; aren't you, Archie?" went on Jack, winking at his chums the eye concealed from Fathead.

"Oh, ain't I just! Um! Pie! I love pie!" and the puffy eyes of the lad closed in gleeful anticipation.

"Then you won't mind if I ask you to help carry some pies up?"

"I guess not."

"You see those baskets there?" went on Jack, pointing to those containing the crabs, which had been left on the beach near the boats.

"Sure," replied Archie. "Have they got pies in 'em?"

"They might have," answered Jack, which was true enough. They might have contained pies, only they didn't. "Just go down, and grab a handful of 'em. They're fine eating.

Jack explained afterward that he meant the crabs were find eating, a statement borne out by abundant testimony.

Archie, who was very hungry, hastened down to where the baskets were. He paused as he looked down into them.

"They're covered with grass," he said, for



Sam had spread the green seaweed over the crabs, to keep them from being spoiled by the hot sun.

"That's to keep 'em cool," explained Jack. "Watch out for some fun now, fellows," he warned his chums. "Just reach in, and grab 'em up, grass and all," he called to Archie. "Leave it on to keep 'em cool."

Archie did so. There were several large crabs on top of the pile which Sam and Bony had caught, and the crustaceans were just in the proper temper to resent any further interference with them. No sooner had Archie thrust his hands in the basket, than every one of his fingers and his two thumbs were caught in the grip of the claws of several crabs. And the creatures pinched with all their power.

"Oh! Ouch! Help! I'm killed! I'm caught! Something has hold of me!" yelled Archie, springing back, and holding up his hands, from which dangled five or six crustaceans. "Something has hold of me! Help! Help!" cried the too-curious lad.

"You mean you have hold of something!" answered Jack, laughing so that he was hardly able to run down the beach. "Let go of our pet crabs!" he cried. "What are you bothering with them for?"



"Oh! Oh! Take 'em off! They'll pinch my fingers off!" came from Archie, as he danced around wildly.

"Put 'em down on the sand, and they'll let go fast enough," advised Jack.

Archie stooped over, and put his hands, to which the crabs were still clinging tightly, down on the beach. As soon as the creatures felt some firm support beneath them, they released their grip, and scurried off.

"There goes my crab salad!" cried Sam, running down the sand, and with two sticks, fastened together in the shape of tongs, he began catching the crabs and putting them back into the basket.

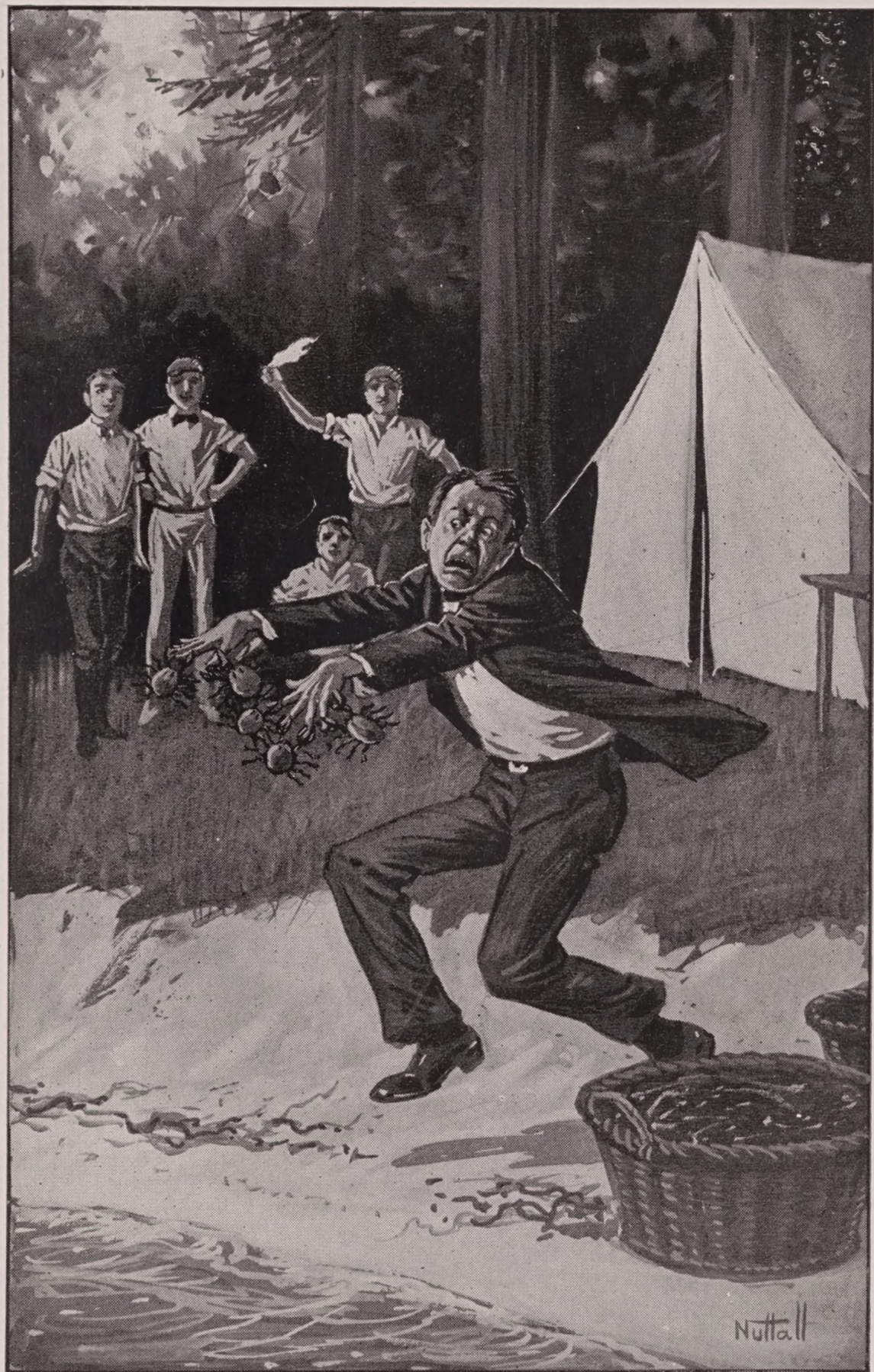
Archie was critically examining his fingers, which, while badly pinched, were not much injured.

"Queer I should have made that mistake," said Jack solemnly. "Weren't there any pies in those baskets, Archie?"

"No, and you knew it too, Jack Ranger! It was a trick, but you wait! I'll get even with you!"

"Won't you stay and have some lunch?" went on Nat. "We are going to cook the crabs soon, and you could help. I think we'll take you along





"Let go of our pet crabs"







the next time we go crabbing. They are so fond of you that you'd make good bait."

"Hu! Think you're smart, don't you!" retorted Archie, and, in his anger, he began to look about for a stone to throw, as that was his favorite form of retaliation. But there was only sand on the beach. However Nat saw his intention.

"Come on, fellows, let's duck him in the bay!" he cried, but Fathead did not wait. He took to his heels, and was soon out of sight in the woods.

"There, I guess he'll keep clear of this camp after this, the little nuisance," remarked Jack. "Come on, fellows, I'm hungry, and grub is ready."



## CHAPTER XV

### THE BOYS INVESTIGATE

"WELL, now for our investigation of the affairs of Hemp Smith and his partners in crime," announced Jack as he arose early the next morning. "And, in order to be in good shape for it, I, for one, am going to take a dip."

He ran from the tent, clad only in his bathing suit, and was soon splashing about in the waters of the bay, where he was joined by his chums.

"Say, but this is sport," observed Nat, as he turned a somersault in the brine. "Pete and Aleck don't know what they're missing."

"That's right," agreed Sam. "We'll go camping with you next year, Jack."

"Wait until we see how this season turns out."

"Oh, I'm satisfied so far, aren't you, Bony?" asked Sam, of his fellow-guest.

"Certain sure. All I want now is Fred Kaler to play a nice, restful melody on his mouth organ, and I'd be in fairyland all right," remarked Bony,



trying to float, an accomplishment he was not an adept at, because of his lack of flesh and fat.

"Old Fred," murmured Jack. "I'll be glad to see him and all the fellows at Washington Hall again."

"Then you're going back?" asked Sam.

"I guess so. Haven't made my plans much further ahead than to-day, though. If we smoke out Hemp Smith ——"

"Grub's ready," sang out Budge from the cooking tent, and there was a scramble on the part of the boys to see who would be first at table. They sat down with rosy cheeks, aglow with health, and all possessing enormous appetites.

"Well, the sooner we start the quicker we'll be there," remarked Jack, when Budge started to clear away the breakfast things. "We'll take plenty of grub along, and then we can stay until dark. Don't worry about us, Budge."

"Guessyukinmanageawright," spoke Budge in one mouthful, as he calmly went on masticating his gum.

The boys ran the boats down to the water, and, armed only with lunch baskets, they started to row for the river, up which they would have to proceed for some distance before they would come to the



spot where they could strike off into the woods, to the spot where the cave was located.

"Now, we might as well have some order about this expedition," said Jack, when they had left the boats, and started on the tramp through the woods.

"All right, General Hardtack, what do you propose?" asked Sam with a grin.

"Well, I was going to say that Nat and I had better go in advance, as we know the way best. You and Bony can follow us, and, when we get near the cave, if Nat and I don't see any signs of danger, we can signal you to advance."

"That's a good idea," declared Bony. "Go ahead, Jack. We'll follow within seeing distance."

"And don't make any more noise than you can help," advised Nat. "Sounds carry a long distance in the woods."

They advanced cautiously, Nat and Jack in the lead, until they came to a spot whence they could view the pile of stones that concealed the chimney of the cave.

"Take it easy now," whispered Jack to Nat. "They may be on the lookout."

But a cautious reconnoiter did not disclose anyone about the cave, nor was there any sign of the vapor coming from the gasoline engine.

"Shall we signal for Sam and Bony?" asked



Nat. "They're just behind that big button-ball tree."

"Wait a second," advised Jack, and it was well that he did so, for, hardly had he spoken, than from the center of a big, dead stump, not a hundred feet from where the boys were, a man's red head was thrust up.

Jack had just time to duck down behind a log, and pull Nat with him, when the man looked in their direction.

"The red-headed man!" whispered Jack. "He's here with them. The mystery is growing deeper."

Nat only nodded. It was too risky to whisper much. The man, who looked like some grotesque jack-in-the-box, peering as he was from the middle of the stump, looked about in all directions. Then, as if satisfied that there was no danger, he withdrew his head, disappearing from view.

"That's how they got out of sight so quickly," whispered Jack. "They went down the hollow stump. That must be an entrance to the cave."

"That's right," agreed Nat. "What'll we do now?"

"Wait a bit, and see what happens."

They did not have long to wait. In a few minutes they heard the rumbling of the earth, and saw



the vapor rising from the pile of stones. At the same time they smelled burning gasoline.

"They've started up the plant," said Jack, venturing now to speak a little above a whisper. "I guess we can go closer and look about."

"Shall I signal Bony and Sam to come up?"

"Might as well. Smith and Lavine will probably be so busy now they won't be on the lookout."

Sam and his chum, approaching cautiously, joined Jack and Nat, and were told of the situation.

"Let's go and investigate the tree stump," proposed Sam.

"No," said Jack. "They might just take a notion to look out when we least expected it."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"We'll fetch a big circle, and come up on either side of the stump. If that's a cave big enough to run a printing plant in, it's probably got more than one entrance. We may find another, or a place where we can look in. Nat and I will go off to the right, and you can take the left. Then, if they spot one party, the other may be able to discover something, anyway."

Jack's plan was voted a good one, and the boys, agreeing to meet back where the boats were moored



on the river's bank, at noon time, in case they did not join before, started off.

Jack and Nat fetched a long curve, and, in about half an hour had come to a point in line with the hollow stump, but some distance in front of it. There they halted and looked cautiously about them.

"See anything?" asked Jack.

"No. Do you?"

"Nope, and I don't hear anything. Wonder where Sam and Bony are?"

"Oh, they can look out for themselves. Hold on, though, what's that?"

"It's the press starting up again!" exclaimed Jack. "They must have stopped it, and started it again. It sounds plainer here, too."

"So it does," admitted Nat. "There must be an entrance near here. Maybe that stump where the red-haired man stuck up his head was only a lookout place."

"Guess it was. Let's go a little closer."

They advanced, treading softly, and suddenly came to a halt, for they heard a voice speaking, almost at their side. And the voice was that of Hemp Smith. They knew it well, and they started as they heard Jack's enemy ask:



"Shall I throw 'em out?"

"Yes, toss 'em out of the hole," replied some one, whom Jack at once decided was Lavine. "They're spoiled. We'll have to print some more."

"Somebody may find 'em," objected Hemp.

"Guess not. Nobody's in these woods."

"Those fellows at Ranger's camp may take a notion to come here."

"No danger. We're too well hid. Throw 'em out, and to-night we'll burn 'em up."

The sound of voices, coming from persons whom neither Jack nor Nat could see, look about as they did, was sufficiently startling, but the lads were more surprised when there suddenly showered down on them hundreds of pieces of paper, like stage snow. They looked up quickly, to notice that the scraps were coming from what was apparently a rock jutting out from the side of a little hill, at the foot of which they stood.

"That's an opening to the cave," whispered Jack.

"Sure," agreed Nat. "But what sort of stuff are they printing?" and he stooped to pick up some of the scraps of paper, that had now ceased falling.



Jack also reached for some. He looked at the fragments and then gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"This explains it!" he said.



## CHAPTER XVI

### CAPTURED

NAT gazed queerly at his chum.

"Explains what?" he said.

"The stuff they're printing. Look, these are parts of stock certificates and railroad bonds."

"Stocks and railroad bonds?"

"Hush! Not so loud. They may hear us. Yes, that's what they are."

"But there's no need to do that underground. It's no crime to print them."

"I guess it is — the kind these fellows are printing," replied Jack. "They're probably bogus. Lavine is a stock swindler and promoter, my father told me."

"Well, we've discovered them all right," commented Nat. "Now what's to be done?"

"That's the question. I wish dad was here to advise me. I don't really know what to do. Probably Lavine is getting ready to work some big cheating game, and he wants the stocks and bonds printed secretly. Or maybe he does this



work for a lot of other swindlers. In either case the authorities ought to know about it."

"That's right," agreed Nat. "What's matter with telling Mr. Skidmore? He'll know who are the best persons to tell."

"Good idea. I believe we'll do that. But first let's see if we can't get a look inside that cave. I'd like to know how the land lays before we give information."

"Isn't there any way of getting up to that hole where they threw out the papers?" asked Nat.

"Maybe. We'll try it. It's a pretty steep hill, but I guess we can do it. Now mind, no talking after we get started, and don't make any noise. The slope is grassy, and we ought to be able to get there without making a sound. Then, maybe, we can look right in and see 'em at work. Evidently they don't suspect anything, or they wouldn't throw the pieces out that way, and talk so loudly. Come on, now. Put some of these pieces in your pocket for evidence. We'll leave most of 'em on the ground, in case they come to look for 'em to burn 'em up."

The boys looked with critical eyes at the sloping hill which lay before them. They had undertaken much more difficult feats than scaling it, but never under such circumstances. If they were discov-



ered when half way up, they would be in a precarious position. But this did not deter them.

They began their climb. Up and up they went, bending almost double to preserve their equilibrium, and digging their hands and feet into the grassy soil to prevent slipping. When they were half way to the rocky ledge they paused to rest. They could see no opening in the side of the hill, as the stone jutted out so that it hid whatever aperture there was. But the boys knew one must be there.

With a silent motion Jack signalled his chum to proceed. They resumed their climb. In a short time they were near enough to the rocky ledge so that they could grasp the edge of it. They found there was a sort of hollowed-out place in the side of the hill, where they could rest their feet.

"I'll go first," whispered Jack, his lips close to Nat's ear. "You follow."

Nat nodded. Jack slowly began to pull himself up to the ledge, as an athlete chins himself on the bar. Jack was an adept at this. In a few moments he was able to get his elbows over the edge, and then it was an easy matter to scramble up. Fortunately the ledge was wide enough to offer a narrow resting place.



Nat began to pull himself up, but he was not as strong or as skillful at this as Jack had been, and his chum was obliged to help him. A moment later, however, Nat too, was on the ledge. What they saw filled the two lads with astonishment.

They found that the ledge was a sort of natural window sill, and that through the opening thus reached, they could look right into a large cave. And they could see plainly, for several brilliant lamps, hung here and there, gave sufficient illumination.

The beams did not show from the outside in the day time, and at night they were doubtless hidden by closing all openings. But it was not the lighted cave which attracted the attention of the boys, so much as did the persons and things that were in it.

For as they looked they saw several men busy about some small printing presses, that were operated by a compact gasoline engine that stood in one corner. Near the center of the cave was a spot of light, different from that cast by the lamps, and a ladder near it at once told the boys what it was. This was the place where the hollow stump reached up to the surface, and through which the red-headed man had taken an observation.



"We've discovered 'em!" whispered Nat.

Jack nodded.

"But where's the red-headed man?" went on his chum. "I can see Hemp," and he pointed to a figure bending over one of the presses.

"Yes, and there's Lavine," added Jack, indicating a man examining some sheets of printed paper, by the light of a large lamp. So intent were the men on what they were doing, that they were not aware of being spied upon. Fortunately for the boys, at least for the time being, the hole through which they were gazing was some distance away from the center of the cave, where the men stood.

"The red-headed man isn't here," said Jack. "Maybe he's on the outside looking around. If he is he may spot us, or Sam and Bony."

The boys looked anxiously around the cave, for a sight of the red-haired man, but he was not in sight. In all there were five men in the place, including Hemp and Lavine. They were very busy, one attending to the engine, another to the presses, while Lavine and Hemp stopped from time to time to examine the things being printed, which the boys judged to be more counterfeit stocks and bonds.

"Well, we can't do anything here," whispered



Nat. "Let's get down, find Sam and Bony, and then notify Mr. Skidmore. We can catch these fellows in the act."

Jack nodded. He took one more look into the cave, and then prepared to get down off the ledge, which was a more difficult task than getting up.

He put his legs over the ledge, and was just about to slide off, when a surprising thing happened. There was a rumbling and trembling of the earth, the rock on which the boys were seemed to give way, and, the next instant they felt themselves falling.

Down they went, but not down the hillside, from which tumble they would have suffered comparatively little harm, but in the opposite direction. Backward they toppled, right into the cave itself, for the natural window ledge had given way with them, and cast them into the midst of the men at their mysterious operations.

At first the boys were too much shaken up, too blinded by the dust and fragments of rock, and too frightened to realize what had happened. They were dimly conscious of startled shouts, and a rush of feet.

When the dust cleared away, and the boys could, from the mass of debris in which they were, look about them, they saw that they were surrounded



by the five men, who, to tell the truth, were almost as much startled as were their unexpected visitors.

"What does this mean! Who are you? What right —" began Lavine in blustering tones.

Jack saw Hemp Smith step up to the man and whisper something.

"Ranger, eh?" replied Lavine. "And his chum! They've been spying on us! But we've caught them! Nick and Sid, close the window!"

"You can't," answered one of the men. "The slide's busted."

Involuntarily Jack glanced up. He saw that a wooden slide had been used to close up the window through which he and Nat had tumbled, but their fall had disarranged it.

"Then take 'em to the inner cave!" ordered Lavine. "We'll teach them to spy on us!"

Jack arose, followed by Nat. They brushed the dust from their garments, and were glad to find that they were not injured beyond a severe shaking-up.

"How are you, Mr. Hemp Smith?" asked Jack coolly, as he gazed at his former enemy. "I guess you didn't expect to see me here!"

Hemp muttered something below his breath. Then, seeming to think of something, he suddenly



pulled a red wig from his pocket and put it on his head.

"The red-haired man!" exclaimed Nat.

That much of the mystery was solved, at any rate. Hemp had worn the wig as a disguise. The boys had thus seen him before they had been aware of it, for they remembered the man who appeared in the meadow the time the motor boat had exploded.

Hemp did not reply. He ran to the ladder, which stood under where the hollow stump gave a view from the cave, and mounted upward. He came back in a few moments.

"All's clear," he announced to Lavine.

Meanwhile Jack and Nat had been looking about them. With a natural instinct to escape from the underground place, Jack began edging over toward the window through which he had tumbled. The opening was now much larger.

"Nick — Sid!" exclaimed Lavine, with a nod toward the opening, and the men placed themselves between the boys and the only visible way of escape. "Now you're here, I guess you'll stay for a while," added Lavine with a sneering laugh. "We didn't invite you, and you're not wanted, and you'll have to take the penalty for spying on us."



"Do you mean that you're going to keep us here?" asked Jack boldly.

"That's just what I mean, Jack Ranger. You've poked your head into the lion's mouth, and you've got to take the consequences."

Jack laughed, but he was far from feeling as confident as he seemed.

"I guess you'll find it rather hard to hold us here, if we don't want to stay," he said.

"Oh, I guess not," retorted Lavine, easily.

"We have friends outside," added Nat. "They'll be looking for us in a little while, and they'll have the police down on you before night."

"First they've got to find us," replied Lavine.

"They'll do that easily enough," answered Jack. "They know where the hollow stump is. They saw Hemp Smith was looking from it, with his red wig on."

Hemp uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"I think we can manage to fool them," went on Lavine. "Lonny," he added to one of the three men, "just plug up the hollow stump, and lower it down."

"To the surprise of Jack and Nat, they saw that the stump could be raised and lowered, and, as they watched, they saw it pulled down into the



cave, so that from outside it was probably flush with the ground. At the same time the man called Lonny slid a board into a slot in the side, thus cutting off any view from the top.

"There, let your friends find us now, if they can," said Hemp.

"They'll do it easily enough," replied Jack.

While this was going on he had not been idle. He had slowly been edging toward the window through which he had fallen, and, by gently pulling on Nat's coat, had given him a hint of what he was about to do.

"Make a dash for it!" whispered Jack to Nat, when he saw that the attention of the men was on what Lonny was doing to the hollow stump.

The two boys made a sudden spring, hoping to escape, but Lavine was too quick for them. With one blow he knocked Nat down, stunning him, and Nick aimed a blow at Jack, but our hero cleverly dodged it, and struck back. But he could not guard himself in the back, and Sid, sneaking around behind, tripped him.

"The ropes, Hemp! We'll tie these lads so they can't make any more trouble for us!" exclaimed Lavine.

Jack struggled desperately to escape from the



grip of Nick and Sid, but it was no use. The men were too strong for him. A moment later he and Nat, who was beginning to recover his senses, were securely tied, and were carried to the rear part of the cave.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE PLOTTERS PLAN

JACK felt that it would be of little avail to struggle. He was too securely held and bound for that, but he made up his mind he would escape the first chance he got.

"Poor Nat," he mused as he felt himself being carried along, he knew not whither. "I'll give it to Hemp and Lavine good and proper when I get a chance, to make up for what they did to you," and he was boiling inwardly with rage at his own helplessness.

"Right this way with 'em," he heard Lavine saying, and then the partly illuminated cave gave place to intense darkness. The two boys had been carried into a sort of inner cavern.

"What'll we do with 'em?" Jack heard Hemp Smith ask.

"We'll leave 'em here for the present," Lavine responded, "and then we'll consider what to do. We've got to make some move. I guess this end of the game's up."



"It will be if I get out of here, and have anything to say," thought Jack.

He was deposited on the bare ground, none too gently, and a voice asked:

"Shall we take off the ropes?"

"Not much," answered Lavine. "They're too slippery customers for that; eh, Hemp."

"Not that name," came from Jack's old enemy quickly.

"Oh, I forgot, you're supposed to be Colonel Livermore, aren't you?" went on Lavine with a short laugh. "But it's no use keeping that up any longer. We'll have to clear out of here. But come outside. I want to have a talk with you."

Jack could hear the men leaving, and a door closed after them, but it was too dark for him to distinguish anything. A movement from Nat attracted his attention.

"How are you, Nat?" he called softly, trying to roll over closer to his chum, but desisting as he happened to think he might tumble down some hole in the darkness.

"Well, I don't exactly know myself," replied Nat slowly. "What happened? Where are we? I seem to remember a cave-in."

"One of the scoundrels knocked you down. Does your head hurt much?"



"Not so very, but I feel rather dizzy. Where are we?"

"In some sort of a small cave, inside the big one I think. They carried us here and left us."

"Can't we get away?"

"I don't see how. I'm all tied up with ropes."

"So am I. Can you wiggle loose?"

"I'm going to try," replied Jack. He strained at his bonds, but with no effect. The men had done their dastardly work thoroughly.

"I wonder how long they're going to leave us here?" mused Nat. "My head aches fit to split, now."

"It's tough," agreed Jack, "but I'm not going to beg them to let us out."

"Me either," added his chum quickly. "I'll never let them know we're worried," he said grimly.

For a few moments the boys were silent, turning over in their minds some plan of escape, and hoping that either Budge or Sam and Bony, would, in some manner, discover their plight, and come to their aid.

Suddenly the silence that had been maintained for some time was broken and the boys heard men speaking. They easily determined that Lavine



and Hemp Smith were conversing somewhere near them.

"Listen to what they say," whispered Jack. "We may hear something that will give us a tip on how to get out."

The men's voices sounded plainer now, and the boys decided that their captors were outside in the main cave, close to the dividing wall of their prison, in which there must have been some opening to allow the sound to penetrate.

"Well, we've got 'em, but what are we going to do with 'em?" they heard Hemp Smith ask Lavine.

"I'll keep them prisoners until I think it's safe to let them go," replied the rascally promoter.

"When will that be?"

"I don't know."

"But it's risky to keep them here."

"I know it is, but what can I do? It's risky to let 'em go. We've got to move the plant, that's sure. We could shift it in a week or two, further down the river. I know of another cave —"

"Not so loud," cautioned Hemp. "They might hear."

"It won't do them any good if they do. We'll take good care they don't find the next place. But



I want to get that batch of bonds printed. That scheme must go through this week. After that —”

“Lavine seemed to hesitate.

“Well, after that?” asked Hemp suggestively.

“We’ll decide what to do with the boys. I’ve got a plan in mind which I think will take them out of the way for a good while, and then we can do as we please.”

“What is it?”

Just then, either the men shifted their position away from the opening through which the sound of their voices came, or else they spoke in lower tones, for, listen as Jack and Nat did, all they could hear was this fragment of a sentence:

“—aboard the *Polly Ann*, and then Reeger will look after them.”

It was Lavine who spoke, and after that there was silence.

“Did you hear that, Jack?” asked Nat.

“Yes. What do you make of it?”

“The *Polly Ann* must be some kind of a boat or ship. I wonder if they’re going to take us away somewhere?”

“It begins to look that way,” admitted Jack gravely. “I’m afraid we’re up against it, Nat.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### ALARM IN CAMP

WHEN Sam and Bony left Jack and Nat, and started to circle through the woods, to see what they could discover in the way of an approach to the cave, they advanced cautiously keeping a lookout in every direction.

"I'd like to spot that red-headed man," remarked Bony. "I think I'd capture him, just for fun."

"No, don't do anything like that," advised Sam. "Jack wants matters kept quiet until he finds out what's up. "We've got to do some spy work for a while yet."

"All right, I'm willing. But say, I wish they had a sidewalk through these woods. This rough walking hurts my feet."

"What you need is some fat on your bones," replied Sam, with a grin.

The boys walked on until they judged they had reached a place where they ought to get a view of the approach to the cave, in case one existed at



that end. But they saw nothing that gave them any encouragement.

"Let's work back a way," suggested Bony.  
"There's nothing doing around here."

They retraced their steps, but the more they wandered about the more confused they became, for the woods was quite dense in that locality.

"Oh, I'm going back where we started from!" exclaimed Sam at length. "There's no good tramping around here. If there's any entrance Jack's found it by this time, or else he's back at the place where we agreed to meet."

"Before we go back to the boats," said Bony, "let's take another look at the stump. Maybe Jack's there."

"All right," agreed Sam. "Come on."

They soon reached the place where they had observed the red-haired man poking his head up from the natural watch tower.

"That's queer," remarked Sam, as he peered about him.

"What is?"

"The stump's gone."

"We haven't got to the place yet," declared Bony.

"Yes, we have. There's the button-ball tree



where we were hiding just before we saw Mr. Red-head."

"That's right," Bony had to acknowledge.

"But the stump's gone," went on Sam. "It stood right near that big rock."

"Let's go over and take a closer look," proposed Bony.

Cautiously the boys approached. There was no doubt about it, the stump had gone, for, by this time Jack and Nat had made their sensational entrance into the cave, and Hemp Smith had lowered the observation tower.

"Well, this is certainly a funny go," observed Sam, scratching his head in perplexity.

"It sure is," agreed Bony. "The stump was certainly here and now it's gone. Let's look for the stone chimney."

But that too had been removed, and there was no evidence to show where it had been, though, as they afterwards learned, a big flat stone which they saw covered the hole in the ground, only they never thought of raising it.

"Well, it's back to the boats for ours," said Sam, after looking about a bit longer. "Probably Jack and Nat are there now, waiting for us."

But they were not, as we know, and after a long



and rather anxious wait, the two chums decided to eat some of the lunch they had brought along.

"Queer they don't come," remarked Sam, after two hours or more had passed.

"That's what! I wonder what we'd better do?"

"Can't do anything but wait, I suppose."

"Maybe they're lost in the woods."

"Not very likely. Jack can find his way almost anywhere. They'll turn up all right."

But when it grew dark, and his chums had not returned, Sam was forced to admit that there might be a possibility that Jack and Nat were lost.

"Then let's hunt for 'em," proposed Bony.

"It's too dark for that now. The only thing we can do is to go back to camp and wait for them. Budge will be worried if all of us stay away."

"I don't believe Budge would worry over anything, but I guess we had better go back. Shall we leave Jack's boat here?"

"Sure. He and Nat might get back here at midnight and it's too far to walk to camp."

It was with no very light or cheerful hearts that Sam and Bony rowed back to where the tent was erected on the beach. Budge, was down to the water's edge, peering about in the hope of some sight of the chums.



"Juhaveanicetime?" he asked.

"Nice nothing!" exclaimed Sam in disgust. "This business of hunting up conspirators who have an underground printing plant may be all right in stories, but it's too strenuous in real life."

The night passed, and there was no sign of Jack and Nat, for they were still prisoners in the cave. In the morning Sam was more worried than he cared to admit. So were Bony and Budge, only they spoke freely of it.

"We'd better go back where we left the boat," proposed Bony. "We've got to get some trace of 'em."

Sam agreed, and, leaving Budge again in charge of camp, for they had many possessions there which they did not want stolen, Sam and Bony rowed up the river again. They found the boat undisturbed where they had left it, and, tying their own craft, they made another search through the woods. But they found no trace of the missing ones.

"We'd better get word to the police authorities," said Sam, when they were back at the boats.

"I don't believe they have any police out here."

"Well, they must have constables or some kind of officers. I'm afraid something has happened to Jack and Nat."



"Suppose we tell Mr. Skidmore? He ought to know what to do."

"All right, I will. Come on back to camp. Might as well take both boats, too. Jack won't come here now, if he does start back for camp."

"Where will he go?"

"Blessed if I know. It's a puzzle. The sooner we get help to solve it the better. Come on."

Each one rowing a boat, Sam and Bony made their way back to camp, where, telling Budge of their object, they set off for Sickonsonnett to inform Mr. Skidmore, and ask his advice.

They found Jack's friend in his general store, for he was the proprietor of a grocery and dry-goods "Emporium," as a sign over the front door announced.

"I was just going out to your place," said the man. "I've got a message for one of you boys, but this will save me the trouble. It just come."

"Who's it for?" asked Sam.

"For you. Here it is."

"Maybe it's from Jack," said Bony hopefully. Sam tore it open. Then his face became pale.

"My father is very ill," he said. "I have to go home at once!"



"But what about Jack?" asked Bony.

"You'll have to stay and help hunt him. You and Budge. I must leave camp right away. Poor dad!"

"Trouble?" asked Mr. Skidmore sympathetically. "Can I help?"

Sam quickly told the story of Jack's and Nat's absence.

"I'll get things started right away for a search," declared the store keeper. "Now don't you worry. You can go home, Mr. Chalmers. Your chum and me'll find Jack Ranger. I've got a great admiration for that lad."

"So have I," declared Sam. "I wish I could stay, and help find him, but I don't see how I can."

"No, of course not. You go home to your father," answered Bony. "We'll find Jack and Nat."

Sam had to go back to camp for his things, and he explained to Budge the necessity for leaving.

"Sallright," said Budge calmly. "We'll find Jack," and, to better bear up under the stress of the occasion, he indulged in a double ration of chewing gum.

Meanwhile Mr. Skidmore was getting ready to organize a posse, in charge of several county constables, to hunt for the missing lads. It was not



uncommon, he had told Bony and Sam, just prior to their return to camp, for persons to be lost in the woods, but there was practically no danger.

“There is when that Hemp Smith is around,” declared Sam.

“Well, we’ll organize a good force and arrest him,” promised Mr. Skidmore.



## CHAPTER XIX

### ABOARD THE POLLY ANN

"SAY, Jack," remarked Nat, after a pause, during which they had waited in silence in the cave, hoping to hear more talk, "I'm hungry, ain't you?"

"I'm too mad to be hungry," replied Jack. "I'd just like to be free, and outside with Hemp Smith or Lavine for a few minutes. Yes, I'd tackle 'em both, and I believe I could do 'em up."

"I believe you could, and I'd help," said Nat, for Jack was a powerful lad, and was always in fighting trim, because of his athletic activity.

"But it's no use wishing I suppose," went on our hero, "and now, since you've mentioned it, I do feel as if I could eat a bit."

"Withering whangdoodles! A bit? I could eat half a dozen bits! Think of all the good stuff back in camp, and here we are!"

"They can't be going to starve us," remarked Jack. "They will have to give us something to eat before very long, or I'll raise such a rumpus



that they'll be glad to feed me to keep me quiet."

"That's a good idea. Let's yell now."

"All right. Go ahead."

Thereupon Jack and Nat set up such a lusty concert that it brought Lavine and Hemp Smith to their dungeon on the run.

"Here! What's the matter with you fellows?" angrily demanded Lavine.

"We're hungry," replied Jack boldly. "If we don't get something to eat pretty soon, we'll yell until we do. Our friends will hear us, too."

"No danger of that. You're too far under ground," said the promoter, but he did not seem altogether easy, as the boys could observe by the light of a lantern Hemp Smith carried. "However, we'll feed you," went on Lavine. "We don't intend to treat you any harsher than we can help. You interfered with our business and you'll have to take the consequences. All we want to do is to keep you out of the way until — well, until we get ready to let you go."

"And that had better be pretty soon," spoke Jack.

"It'll be when I get good and ready," was Lavine's retort. "Now if you yell again we shall have to gag you, and I don't want to do that."

"Then feed us," insisted Nat.



"All right, you shall have something to eat, but don't you yell again."

"He's afraid of us," whispered Nat to Jack, when Lavine and Hemp had gone out, taking the lantern with them. "He's afraid some one will hear us. Shall we yell some more?"

"No, he may carry out his threat, and gag us. I shouldn't like that."

"Me either. Well, we'll lay low for a while, but I wish they'd hurry up with that grub."

A little later the door of their prison was opened, and the men whom Lavine had addressed as Nick and Lonny came in. One of them carried a lantern, and the other some plates of food and a pitcher of water.

"Now if you fellows cut up any capers it'll be the worse for you," spoke Nick, with more of a growl than a voice. "We're going to untie you, while you eat, but we'll stand on guard."

The boys were hungry enough to enjoy even the coarse food provided by their captors. When they had finished, Nick insisted on tying them up again.

"You're too risky to let loose," he said. "I admire your spunk, but I've got to do it."

Jack and Nat did not answer. They felt better now that they had eaten and when they were bound



again, and left in sitting positions, on a pile of bags which Nick brought into their dungeon, they did not feel quite so badly.

"Well, Jack, do you think we'll get out of here?" asked Nat, when he and his chum had sat for quite a while in the darkness.

"Maybe not right away, but there's got to be a change soon. They can't keep us here. They know they're likely to be discovered, and I think there'll be a move soon. Probably they'll take us on the *Polly Ann*, whatever that is"

"I wonder what's happened to Sam and Bony?"

"Hard to tell. I suppose they are wondering where we are. And Budge,—maybe he's waiting back there in camp all alone."

"That's where I wish I was."

"Don't get discouraged," advised Jack. "We'll come out all right. I'll get ahead of these fellows yet, smart as they think they are."

Hours passed. Jack and Nat lost all track of time, as they were in complete darkness, but they knew night must be approaching, for it was long past dinner time, and they were beginning to be hungry again.

They could hear movements outside their dungeon, and concluded that the gang, of which Hemp



Smith and Jonas Lavine were the heads, was planning a move. Machinery was being shifted about they knew, by the sound of clanking metal.

"They're changing the plant," said Nat. "Probably shifting it to another place."

"Yes, and probably they'll be shifting us soon," added Jack. "Well, an ocean cruise won't be so bad."

"What makes you think they'll take us on an ocean cruise, Jack?"

"Where else can they take us, if they put us aboard the *Polly Ann*? She's got to go out to sea. She can't go up the river very far."

"Do you think they'll take us aboard a ship?"

"It's hard to say, Nat. We'll have to wait and find out."

They did not have much longer to wait. It must have been early in the night, after the boys had been given a hasty supper, that Hemp Smith, Lavine and Nick entered their dungeon.

"Well, you're going to move," spoke Lavine.

"Anything to get out of this hole," replied Jack, who, through all that trying time, had kept up his good spirits.

"Humph! Maybe you won't like your new quarters any too well."



"I guess the *Polly Ann* will suit us," remarked Jack quietly.

"The *Polly Ann*! What do you know about her?" asked Lavine quickly.

"Perhaps more than you think," retorted Jack.

Lavine seemed about to reply, but Hemp Smith whispered something to him, and he evidently thought better of it.

"We're going to shift you boys," he said, "and if you promise to behave we'll take the ropes off."

"All right," agreed Jack, thinking he might better make a virtue of necessity.

Accordingly their bonds were again loosened, and they were led from the cave. Whither they went they could not tell, as the only light was a lantern carried by Hemp Smith, while Lavine and his three men walked beside the boys. But Jack decided that they were being taken out of the cave, an idea that was confirmed a little later, when he smelled the fresh, cool air of the woods.

But they were not allowed to enjoy this long. Hardly had they stepped from the cave than they were thrust into what seemed a closed carriage, but a puffing and throbbing, a moment later, told them that it was an automobile.

In the dark interior of the covered car, with



Lavine and Nick on either side of them, crowded in the somewhat narrow seat, Nat and Jack felt themselves being rapidly carried over rough ground. The car careened on, swaying and jolting, and, after about an hour's ride, made in complete silence as far as any talking was concerned, the auto came to a stop.

"We get out here," said Lavine.

Dimly wondering where they were being taken, but seeing no chance of escape, Jack and Nat followed. They were led across a stretch of ground, and, a few seconds later they saw before them, in the darkness relieved only by starlight, a three-masted schooner, tied to a dock in the river.

"Get 'em aboard!" ordered Lavine, and his men hastened the progress of the captives. At the gangway the party was stopped by a man who challenged them:

"Who goes there?"

"It's all right. The *Polly Ann* and the dark hole," replied Lavine.

"All right," answered the man. "Captain Reeger is expecting you?"

A little later the two boys found themselves aboard the schooner *Polly Ann*, which was destined to be their home for some time.



## CHAPTER XX

### OUT TO SEA

"WHERE are you taking us?" demanded Jack, as he came to a halt on the deck, and, by the gleam of a ship's lantern looked at Lavine and Hemp Smith. The other three men, who must have ridden on the outside of the auto, crowded around the captives.

"We haven't quite decided yet," answered the promoter with a short laugh. "You're bound on a short cruise, and, perhaps, a long one."

"You have things all your own way now," retorted Jack, "but I want to tell you Jonas Lavine, and you, too, Hemp Smith, *alias* Marinello Booghoobally, *alias* Professor Punjab, that you'll be sorry for this, and very soon, too. You are going too far."

"I'm not worried," was Lavine's answer. "If you behave yourselves nothing will happen to you. If you don't —"

"Well, what then?" asked Jack boldly, for he saw that Lavine was a coward.



"It'll be the worse for you," murmured Hemp Smith.

"You needn't think you can scare us by such talk," put in Nat, seconding Jack's efforts to show that they were not alarmed.

"Well, I want to warn you not to try any tricks aboard this vessel," went on Lavine. "The commander has strict orders to deal with you accordingly, if you do. If you behave quietly no harm will come to you, and you will only be kept out of the way for a time. It's your own fault that you're here, and you'll have to put up with the consequences."

"You said that before," spoke Jack coolly. "Give us something new."

His calm air seemed to irritate Lavine, who turned away with a muttered expression of wrath.

"Are you there, Captain Reeger?" the swindler asked suddenly, as a tall, heavily-built man came up a companion way near where the captives, and their guards, were standing.

"Aye, aye, sir," was the answer. "Is that you Mr. Lavine?"

"Yes, and I have brought those boys I sent you word about. They want to take a voyage for their health, and I recommended your schooner.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the captain as he came into



the circle of light. "That's a good joke, Mr. Lavine. A good joke. Taking a voyage for their health. Ha! Ha!"

Jack looked at the man in charge of the *Polly Ann*. He wanted to see what sort of a character he was. The captain's laugh seemed forced, and his merriment unnatural. He seemed laboring under some excitement, and Jack and Nat noticed that his look kept shifting about, from Lavine to Hemp Smith, and then to the two captives whose direct gaze, however, he appeared to avoid meeting.

"There's something wrong about Captain Reeger," thought Jack, and after events proved that he was right.

"So, those are the boys; eh?" asked the captain.

"Yes," replied Lavine, "and you'll have to look sharp after them. They'll try to get away from you."

"They will, eh? That's a good joke too. I guess they'll have hard work to do that. Look here, young men!" and the captain, who had been smiling, seemed suddenly to become stern. He approached close to Jack and Nat, and leering up into their faces said: "Don't you try that on; do you hear? You'll find me a tough customer!"



Any tricks and I'll clap you in irons and put you in the brig! You'll find Amos Reeger a tough old sea dog, if ever there was one!" and he fairly growled out the words, and looked so menacing that Nat, whom he was nearest to, stepped back in some alarm.

"That's the way to talk to 'em!" exclaimed Lavine approvingly. "If they try any tricks knock 'em down with a belaying pin, and if they try 'em again, knock 'em down the second time."

Captain Reeger turned to look at the speaker. As he did so a curious change came over his face. His countenance lost the fierce look, and he seemed more gentle. He even appeared to smile at Jack and Nat, and he acted as if he wanted to speak gently to them. But at a look from Lavine he grew stern again, and remarked:

"They'll find me a tough customer to get along with. A rough old sea dog, if ever there was one," and with that Captain Reeger turned aside.

"Is the place all ready for 'em?" asked Lavine.

"Yes," spoke the captain shortly. "Bring 'em right along. Have they been fed?"

"They've had all they're going to get," replied Hemp Smith.

"You might give them water," added Nick. "It's going to be a hot night."



"You mind you own business," spoke Lavine quickly. "I'm running this game, and when I want your advice I'll ask for it."

"All right," answered Nick and he shuffled back into the shadow.

Jack and Nat felt grateful for even this evidence of kindness on the part of one of their captors.

"This way," called Lavine sharply. "Are you all ready to sail, Captain Reeger?"

"Yes, Mr. Lavine. I'll drop down the river in half an hour, as soon as the tide's full. There's a nasty bar at the mouth, and I don't want to run up on it."

"No, I wouldn't advise you to. Well, I'm going to leave 'em in your charge. Nick will stay with you, and give you a hand if necessary."

"Oh, I reckon I can look after 'em," replied the commander, and Jack had a feeling that the fierce tone of voice used by the man was forced and unnatural. Captain Reeger seemed to be a man of two personalities. At one time he was stern and ugly, and at others he appeared to want to be kind to his captives. Jack resolved on a bold appeal.

"Captain Reeger!" he exclaimed suddenly, "I want you to understand that my friend and myself are being carried away illegally. We were brought aboard this vessel against our will, and I



demand that you set us ashore. If you don't, at the first chance we get we will cause your arrest. You are doing an illegal act!"

"That'll do you, Jack Ranger!" interrupted Hemp Smith.

"I — er — I didn't —" began Captain Reeger when Lavine fiercely whispered something to him.

"That's all right," spoke the commander gruffly, his manner changing suddenly. "You boys are going with me, and I warn you that if you try any of your tricks it'll go hard with you. I'm a tough old sea dog. As tough a one as ever sailed a ship! So look out, both of you!"

Jack was disappointed. He hoped his appeal to the captain, who, he thought, might possibly be deceived by Lavine, would prove of some benefit. But the commander was evidently in the promoter's pay, and would do as Lavine requested.

"This way," called Captain Reeger, motioning for the boys to follow him. "Here, Larson, lend a hand here. They may be up to some trick."

As he spoke a big Swede, who, as the lads learned later, was the mate, shambled forward, and took his place beside the captives. Nick brought up in the rear. There was no chance to escape and Jack and Nat, very much downcast and sick at heart, followed the commander.



"We're going ashore," said Lavine to the captain. "We'll let you hear from us later. You know where to go; don't you?"

"Oh yes, I'll follow the instructions you gave," and Jack imagined that the captain spoke bitterly.

The young captives saw Hemp Smith, Lavine and the other two men go ashore, and, as Jack and Nat were led down a dimly-lighted companion way, they heard the puffing of the automobile that had brought them to the ship.

"Here's where you stay!" spoke the captain gruffly, a little later, and the boys found themselves thrust into a dark hole. A door was closed upon them, and they stood for a few moments not daring to move, for fear of falling down some opening.

"Well, this is the worst yet," remarked Nat. "Where are you, Jack? I can't see two inches in this place."

"I'm right here. They must have put us into the hold. But wait a minute. I've got some matches and we'll take a look. It's lucky they didn't leave us tied as they did in the cave."

"That's right. Go ahead, strike a match."

A moment later a little flare of light showed them the interior of their prison. It was a small compartment, somewhere in the lower part of the



ship. It had evidently been used as a storeroom at one time, for there were no openings or port-holes in the sides. There was a small ventilator in the door.

"Here's a lantern," exclaimed Nat, as he saw one swinging from a hook overhead. "Let's light it. No use being in the dark."

Jack applied the match to the wick, and the boys felt more cheerful as the kindly, mellow glow shone about them. They saw that there were some chairs, a table, and two bunks in the compartment.

"They evidently expected us," remarked Jack. "This place seems all ready for us."

"Too ready," grumbled Nat.

"I'm sorry I got you into this trouble," said Jack quickly, fancying he detected a note of anger in Nat's voice. "I shouldn't have made you come."

"Oh, you get out!" exclaimed Nat. "Don't you s'pose I wanted to see the thing out, just as much as you did? I'm not kicking. This is a lark. Let's make the best of it. Maybe we can show Captain Reeger a trick that he doesn't know about. It's a pity if two of the brightest students of Washington Hall, if I do say it myself, can't make the bunch on this schooner wish they hadn't



monkeyed with us. We'll make 'em sit up and take notice before we get through with 'em!"

"That's the way to talk!" exclaimed Jack. "I'm glad you feel that way about it. But I wish they'd bring us something to eat and drink. I'm hungry."

"Don't mention it," begged Nat. "You heard what Hemp Smith said."

"Yes, and I'll pay him back for it some day, too. But isn't that some one at the door?"

There was no mistake about it. Someone was fumbling at the lock of the door. A moment later the portal opened, and there appeared, framed in the opening, a tall, good-natured looking colored man, bearing in one hand a large basket, and, in the other, a lighted lantern.

"Why, I see yo' all done gone an' lighted yo' light," he remarked, as he saw the glowing hanging lamp.

"We didn't like the dark," exclaimed Jack. "But who are you?"

"Me? Why, I'se Jupiter Johnson, but dey mostly calls me Jupe, 'cause it's shorter I 'spect, an' Cap'n Reeger ain't a man t' waste words."

"And what are you, Jupe?" inquired Nat. "Are you the chief engineer?"

"Engineer? Good land a' massy! Dis yeah



ain't no steamship. Dis am a schooner, an' I'm de cook! Ha! Ha. Yo'-all done gone an' t'ink dis am a steamship! Good land a' massy!"

"So you're the cook; eh?" repeated Jack. "I hope you've brought something to eat in that basket."

"Dat's jest what I done, boy! I reckoned yo'-all'd be pow'ful hungry, an' when Captain Reeger tole me t' fetch yo'-all in a little snack, I done gone an' put up a good one."

"Did Captain Reeger send you here with food for us?" asked Jack quickly.

"Dat's what he done. Why, dat ain't nuffin', am it?"

"Oh, no. I s'pose not," but Jack was beginning to have some curious thoughts regarding Captain Reeger.

There was a substantial meal in the basket, and some lemonade in a pitcher, which seemed to the thirsty boys the best beverage they had ever drank.

"I'se got orders t' leave this heah grub wif yo'-all," went on Jupe, "an' lock de do' arter me. I hopes yo'-all won't take it mean on my part. I'se got t' do as I'se tole —"

"That's all right," answered Jack, easily. "It isn't your fault. We're going to escape some



night and sink the ship, but we'll see that you're saved."

"Good land a' massy!" exclaimed the colored man, his eyes big with terror. "Yo'-all ain't gwine t' do dat; am yo' now?"

"We sure are!" exclaimed Jack firmly, winking his eye at Nat. "Maybe we'll burn the ship besides sinking her; eh Nat?"

"Sure," replied Nat, as fiercely as possible, considering the fact that he was eating.

"I spects I'd better tell Cap'n Reeger —"

"Don't you mention a word to him, or we'll feed you to the sharks!" whispered Jack savagely.

"Mind! Not a word. We're grandsons of Captain Kidd, the terrible pirate!" he added.

"Mum's the word if you want to live!"

Poor Jupe was trembling, but he managed to promise that he would not reveal the plot of the prisoners. He withdrew hastily after that, and his hand shook so he could hardly lock the door.

"We've got him on our side, at all events," remarked Nat. "I guess it isn't going to be so bad here, after all."

"There's something queer about Captain Reeger," said Jack slowly, in deep thought. "I can't understand him. Hemp Smith gave orders we



weren't to be fed, and Lavine agreed with him. Now the captain is supposed to obey Lavine's orders, I take it, but here he goes and sends us some grub. There's something queer about it."

"Well, don't worry," advised Nat. "Take the goods the gods provide, and say nothing. I'm glad there's a bunk to sleep in, for I'm tired."

The boys were suddenly aware that the vessel was moving. Sounds on deck, of men tramping back and forth, of ropes creaking in pulleys, told them that sails were being hoisted.

"We're off," said Jack.

"Yes, and we don't know where to," added Nat. "Anyway I'm not hungry now."

They sat and talked for some time. No one came to disturb them, and as they were beginning to feel sleepy, in spite of their strange surroundings, they turned in.

Jack must have been asleep for several hours, when he was suddenly awakened, by being tossed against the side of his bunk:

"Are you awake, Nat?" he called.

"Yes. Say, what's the matter?"

"Why, we're out to sea, and there's quite a swell on. The *Polly Ann* has begun her ocean cruise."



## CHAPTER XXI

### BREAKING CAMP

MEANWHILE, under the direction of Mr. Skidmore, efforts were being made to find Jack and Nat. When Sam and Bony returned to camp, the former began packing up his things, in readiness to hurry home to his father, in response to the telegram.

"I hate to leave you, Bony," he said. "It's too bad to spoil your fun."

"You'll not spoil it. Budge and I will have the time of our lives hunting for Jack and Nat; eh, Budge."

"Betcherlife," and Budge started on some fresh gum.

When Sam had packed up, Budge and Bony rowed him to a place where he could take a steamboat that would get him home more quickly than going by train.

"Come back if you can," urged Bony.

"I will, but I don't believe I'll be able to manage it. You find Jack and Nat."



"I will, Sam."

With Sam gone, the camp seemed lonesome, and the two boys, returning to it, experienced a sense of gloom.

"I don't believe we'll stay here, unless we find Jack," announced Bony.

"Snowfun," was the characteristic answer of Budge.

"Tell you what we'll do," went on Bony. "We'll both go back to Sickonsonnett, and help Mr. Skidmore. I don't believe any one will bother our camp, and we'll both feel better if we can join in the search for Jack and Nat."

Budge agreed to this, and, putting the camp in good shape, they set off to see what progress had been made toward getting ready a searching party. They found that Mr. Skidmore had not been idle. Several constables were on hand, and more had sent word that they were coming.

"I guess we've got enough of a party to make a search of the woods," announced the proprietor of the "Emporium." He looked at the little force, of which he had elected himself the head. "You'll have to lead the way," he said to Bony. "Take us where you last saw Jack and Nat."

It was a long tramp through the woods, but finally the searchers arrived at the spot where they



had seen the red-haired man looking up through the big, hollow stump.

"Now scatter," advised Mr. Skidmore. "What we want to do is to find that cave."

This was more easily said than done, and the posse spent all the rest of that day searching for an entrance to the cavern they knew must exist somewhere beneath them. But the rascals, under Lavine's direction, had done their work well, and there was no trace of the cave, in which, at that moment, Jack and Nat were held captive, right under where their friends were looking for them.

"It's too dark to look any further to-night," said Mr. Skidmore finally. "We'll have to come back to-morrow."

"We'll be here," declared Bony.

"Why, where are you going?" asked Mr. Skidmore.

"Back to camp."

"You'd better stay with me to-night," invited the storekeeper. "I've got lots of room, and my wife'll be glad to see you."

"No, I think we'd better return to camp," objected Bony. "You see Jack might come back, and he wouldn't know what to think, if no one was there."



"How's he and his friend goin' to come back when he's lost?" asked one of the constables.

"Or held somewhere by the gang you speak of?" asked another.

"You don't know Jack Ranger," declared Bony confidently. "If there's a way to get loose he'll do it, and if he gets loose he'll come back to camp."

"Swathewill," added Budge quickly.

So nothing Mr. Skidmore could say would induce the boys to spend the night at his home. They went back to camp. Lonely enough it was, and they passed a restless night, hoping, every hour, that they might hear the welcome sound of Jack's voice, or that of Nat.

"Well, he and Nat didn't come," said Bony in disappointed tones as he arose, and helped Budge to get breakfast.

"Nope," was all Budge said, but it did not need a very keen observer to tell that he felt Jack's and Nat's plight greatly. The boys did not care to eat much, and they soon set off for Mr. Skidmore's place.

They found him with several more constables, waiting for them, as news of the missing boys had spread, and all who heard of it were anxious to help find them.



The search was kept up all that day, the woods being crossed and re-crossed in an effort to locate the cave. It was toward dusk when they had their first success. This was the discovery, by one of the constables, of a small hole in the side of a hill. At first he took it for the entrance to the den of a fox, but, when he looked a little closer, he saw that it was quite a large opening, partly concealed by brush and rocks. He and some companions tore these away.

“Here’s the entrance to the cave!” he cried, and Bony, Budge and Mr. Skidmore hastened to the place.

It was indeed the entrance, not the one through which Nat and Jack had fallen, but the main one, through which the boys had been led captive the night they were taken on the schooner. Lavine and his gang had been careless in concealing the opening, after they had fled from it.

For that they had fled, taking all their presses and engines with them, was soon demonstrated. Lanterns were procured, and an examination made. The cave was deserted, and not so much as a scrap of paper was left.

There were evidences that the cavern had been recently occupied, and it was concluded that the men in it had gone, taking Nat and Jack with



them. What the place had been used for none of the searching party could imagine, since they had not the evidence of the torn pieces of bonds and stocks that had given Jack his clew.

"Probably it was a counterfeiting den," said one of the constables. "I wish we'd been a little sooner. The government pays a good reward for the capture of counterfeiters."

"I'd rather have found Jack and Nat," said Bony quietly.

"Same here," added Budge, solacing himself with more gum.

It was decided that it would be little use to hunt any further in the woods, and the posse dispersed. Bony and Budge made up their minds it would be best to break camp, and the next day they packed their things, and shipped them to Denton, whither they followed, carrying the ill news to Mr. Ranger and Jack's three aunts.

That it created consternation may easily be imagined, and Nat's parents were almost frantic. But Mr. Ranger pointed out that the two lads were quite capable of taking care of themselves, even under hard circumstances, and with this Mr. and Mrs. Anderson tried to be content.

"We'll send out a general alarm for them, and



offer a reward," said Mr. Ranger. "Besides I'll go hunting them myself."

"You're not strong enough," objected Aunt Angelina.

"Yes, I am," insisted Jack's father. "My son found me, away off in the Rocky mountains, and now I'm going to find him — no matter where he is!"



## CHAPTER XXII

### JERRY CHOWDEN ABOARD

UNDER ordinary circumstances neither Jack nor Nat would have been much alarmed at the prospect of an ocean voyage. They had done considerable traveling, and they knew how to take care of themselves. But this time it was different.

They were in the power of desperate men, and did not know what would be done with them. They were on a vessel, the size of which they could only guess, and they did not know the quality of the seamanship of Captain Reeger and his crew. They might not know how to sail a ship, in spite of the assertion of the captain that he was an "old sea dog."

Take it all in all Jack Ranger and his chum felt that they were in rather a dangerous position. They were quite alarmed at discovering that they were out to sea.

The two boys got out of their bunks, which was no easy matter on account of the way the ship was pitching and tossing.



"I should say there was quite a swell on," observed Nat. "Jupe's pancakes! — I'm going to say that after this, instead of Jupiter's — it's shorter."

"If we could only get a look out, to see where we were, it wouldn't be so bad. But this is going it blindfold."

"There must be some opening to this place," went on Nat, looking about in the light of the lamp which still burned, but which was swaying to and fro from the motion of the ship.

"I'm afraid not. They wouldn't take any chances on us."

"Speaks well for our abilities."

"Sure it does. The next time Jupe comes in with some grub we must scare him into telling us where the ship's bound."

"Maybe he doesn't know."

"Sure he does. You can't keep a secret like that from a cook. We'll make him tell."

Hoping against hope, the boys made an examination of their prison. There was no opening in it save the door, and this was strong, and, seemingly, well fastened. There was a ventilator in the portal, but it was made in the shape of a window shutter, with fixed slats, sloping upward, and nothing could be seen through it.



The pitching and tossing of the ship seemed to increase, and the boys had difficulty in keeping their footing. They were thrown against the sides of the room, or against the bunks, chairs or table, until they decided the safest position was lying down, so they could brace themselves.

It was nearly nine o'clock, as they saw by Jack's watch, when Jupe came in with another basket of food, and a pot of hot coffee.

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed Nat. "Catty-cornered kitty-winks, Jupe! But you were a long time coming!"

"Wha — what's dat yo' said?" inquired the colored man, his eyes opening very wide.

"Said? What? When?" asked Nat, inspecting the contents of the basket.

"Suffin 'bout cats an' kittens."

"Oh, that's what I always say when I'm hungry," replied Jack's chum. "Cocky doodle-doodle-dums! This is a good breakfast, Jack! Farinaceous fish-cakes!"

"Is yo'— is yo' often troubled that way?" asked Jupe.

"Once in a while," answered Jack. "He gets violent if he doesn't have his way, and then everybody wants to look out."

Jupe began to edge toward the door.



"I — I 'spects I'd better be goin' " he remarked casually. "I'll come in an' git dem dishes when yo'-all is through."

"Wait!" exclaimed Jack, seeing a chance to get the information he wanted. "Jupe, you must tell us where this ship is bound for, or we'll make you walk the plank just before we sink and burn her. Where is she going?"

"Deedy an' I doan know, boss," replied the cook, his eyes rolling until only the whites could be seen. "Cap'n Reeger he done gone an' sail wifout tellin' me or anybody whar we's gwine to. Deedy an' I doan know. Yo'-all wouldn't go fo' to hurt a po' ole cullud cook; would yo'-all now?"

"We might, unless you tell us where we're going," said Nat fiercely. "Look here, Jupe. Withering whangdoodles! If you don't know where the ship's bound to, you can find out!"

"Yais, maybe I could do dat."

"Do it then, or we may have to subject you to the terrible torture of the parallellum pippedon," spoke Jack suddenly. "Bring us the information we need by nightfall, or your life may pay the penalty."

"I — I do jest as yo'-all say," replied Jupe, his knees trembling. "But doan tell Cap'n Reeger."



"We'll feed him to the sharks!" whispered Nat. "Now leave us, Jupe. We would dine in peace."

"Yais sah, I's gwine right away-immejete, sah," and the colored man slid out of the door, which, the boys noticed, was fastened with a spring catch.

They made a good meal, and then waited anxiously for the reappearance of the colored cook. He came in at noon, bringing some more food, but he stated, with every appearance of telling the truth, that he had not been able, as yet, to find out whither the *Polly Ann* was bound.

"I'se gwine to make another try," he whispered.

"Where are we now?" asked Jack.

"We's off de Long Island shoah now, sah."

The colored cook's respect for the two prisoners had increased very materially of late.

"And which way are we going?"

"We's goin' up."

"We must be headed for the New England coast," observed Jack, when the colored man had gone. "I wonder what Lavine's object is?"

There was little use of speculating, and the boys soon gave it up. As Jack was sitting idly in a chair, staring at the door of their prison, as if



it would open of itself, and let them out, he uttered a sudden exclamation.

“What is it?” asked Nat.

“Why didn’t I think of it before?” murmured Jack.

“Think of what?”

“Trying to pick the lock. It wouldn’t be the first time we did it, and they had some pretty good locks at Washington Hall.”

“So they did. Why didn’t we try it before. Let’s do it now.”

Jack and Nat were never without a good knife or two between them, and this time, because they were off camping, they had an unusual supply of various articles in their pockets, which, fortunately, Lavine and his crowd had not emptied.

Jack got out his knife and a button hook, a little instrument with which he had, more than once, opened a lock to some forbidden part of the boarding school. He began to manipulate the lock of their prison.

“Wait a minute!” exclaimed Nat. “Why not take a look out first, and see where we’re going to land, in case we open the door?”

“How can I?”

“There’s the ventilator. Cut out a slat and look through the hole.”



"Sure enough. Why didn't I think of that, too. Here goes for a peep."

It did not take Jack long, using his strong, sharp knife, and standing on one of the chairs, to cut a hole through a slat of the ventilator. He looked from the opening.

"There's some sort of a passage outside," he reported to his chum. "Maybe we could get on deck, and if we once could —"

"What would you do — swim for it?"

"No, but we might yell for help, and be heard by some passing vessel. Or we could put up a fight, and raise such a row that Captain Reeger might be glad to get rid of us."

"I'm ready for anything. Go ahead. Open the door."

This was a more difficult matter than Jack had anticipated. The lock was a heavy, and peculiar one, but he finally solved the problem by cutting a hole clear through the door, so he could slip the button hook through, and pull back the catch that held the portal in place.

It was just getting dusk when the two young prisoners stepped out of the apartment, and looked cautiously about them. No one was in sight.

"This way," whispered Jack. "I think I see a companionway."



They stole cautiously forward, pausing now and then to see if they were observed, or to listen to any sounds that might indicate that their escape had been discovered.

How their hearts beat! Their breaths came laboredly, for much depended on this move. Would they succeed? Or would they be detected and thrust into some place from whence it would be impossible to get out?

Jack reached the foot of the companion stairs. He looked about. No one was in sight. Looking up he could see the evening glow, and he knew that this was the way to the deck.

"Come on," he whispered to Nat. "We can't tell what to do until we get up. Maybe we can lower a boat and get away. There doesn't seem to be any one about."

Cautiously the two stole up on deck. They reached it safely, and noted that it appeared to be deserted. On one side, on davits, hung a boat containing oars. Jack gave one glance across the broad water. It seemed peaceful and calm. They might be able to reach shore, if they could only gain the boat and lower it. They knew how to do it.

"Come on," whispered Jack. "We'll try the boat."



They had almost reached it, and their hearts were beating high with hope, when they were startled by a voice shouting:

“They’re loose! The prisoners are loose!”

They turned to see Nick rushing up to them. He had been standing near the wheel. But their chagrin at being discovered was more than balanced by their surprise at the sight of a figure beside Nick. This was none other than their old enemy Jerry Chowden. He ran along beside Lavine’s crony.

“Catch ’em!” he yelled. “Nab ’em, Nick. I’ll help you! Don’t let ’em get away!”



## CHAPTER XXIII

### CAPTAIN REEGER'S ODDITIES

JACK turned so as to face Jerry. He made up his mind that he would have one good chance at the bully, and give him the best threshing he had ever had. But Jerry had no mind to try conclusions with the lad who had, more than once, bested him. So he dropped back, though he continued to yell to Nick:

"Catch 'em! Grab 'em. I'll call Captain Reeger!"

Nick rushed at Nat, and, though the lad tried to break away, the ruffian's hold was too strong. Jack started to the relief of his chum, but as he did so he felt himself seized from behind, and he heard the voice of Larson, the mate saying:

"Now if yo' bane go easy yo' bane all rate. I no laik hart yo', for I bane strong man. Yo' go easy now."

The Swede was a big fellow, and strong, Jack being no more than a child in his grasp, so our hero concluded, perforce, that discretion was the



better part of valor. He ceased to struggle and Larson held him easily.

"That bane best t'ing fo' yo' do," said the mate, not unkindly.

"If you help us to escape," whispered Jack quickly, "I will pay you well. Help us get into the boat. You can whip Nick."

"Yais, I gais I might, but I bane goin' stay here. Here them boys be, Captain Reeger," and the Swede turned to the commander, still holding Jack. Nick had Nat in a firm grip, while Jerry stood at a safe distance back, and grinned in a aggravating manner.

"So you thought you'd get away, did you?" asked the bully with a sneer. "Well, that's the time you got left!"

"Here! Stow that sort of jaw-tackle," exclaimed the captain. "When I want any talking done I'll let you know."

Jerry slunk away, abashed, and the commander approached Jack and Nat.

"So you didn't care for the quarters I assigned to you; eh?" he asked.

"We thought we'd be able to see more out here," replied Jack, for he fancied he detected a kind note in the captain's voice, and something in



his manner, that indicated that he was not much displeased with the boys' efforts to escape.

"Yes, we have quite a view out here," spoke the commander, and he smiled. "But I think I'll have to put you below," he went on.

"Mr. Lavine's orders were to keep 'em close," put in Nick.

"Don't I know it?" asked the captain fiercely, his manner changing suddenly. "I know my instructions, I reckon. When I want your advice I'll ask for it."

He turned aside and addressed the mate.

"Take 'em below, Mr. Larson," he said, in a harsh voice. "Put 'em in the cabin back of mine, where I can keep my eye on the young cubs. We'll put a stop to this monkey-shine business. How did you get out?" he asked, turning to Jack.

"Very easily. Cut a hole in the door, and slipped back the catch," replied our hero, who saw no reason for concealing the method, since an inspection of the portal of the prison would easily show the manner of their escape.

"Humph!" murmured the commander. "Let me warn you not to try that again. If you do —"

"Captain Reeger!" exclaimed Jack suddenly and boldly, "you have no right to keep us pris-



oners aboard this schooner. You are acting illegally, and, sooner or later, you'll pay for it. I know Hemp Smith to be a criminal, wanted on several charges. My father knows Jonas Lavine, who also has a criminal record. They will be arrested as soon as I can get away from here, and I want to tell you right now that we're going to escape the first chance we get."

"Don't you talk that way to me!" stormed the captain. "I'm in charge of this ship, and —"

"I don't care who you are!" retorted Jack, now thoroughly aroused. "I'm not afraid of you, or any of your pack of cowards, including that bully Jerry Chowden!"

"Don't you call me a bully!" cried Jerry.

"I'll call you anything I like, and you don't dare stand up here to me, face to face on this deck!" declared Jack. "I dare you to! Give him a chance, Captain Reeger. He daren't face me in a fair fight!"

Jack struggled to free himself, but the mate held him fast. Jerry shrank back, as if he feared his enemy would put his threat into execution.

"There, there," spoke Captain Reeger soothingly. "Take it easy now. You can't do any fighting on my ship."



"I'll go for him the first chance I get ashore," threatened Jack.

"Take 'em below, Mr. Larson," ordered the commander again. "I don't like brawls on my deck. Escape if you can," he added, turning to Jack and Nat. "I give you full leave to — only I don't believe you can."

His manner was fierce again, and he seemed to repent of his temporary softness toward his prisoners.

"Better tie 'em," observed Nick.

"I'm giving orders aboard this craft," retorted the captain curtly. "Take 'em below."

There was no choice but for the boys to obey. Nick and Larson led them into a cabin, back of one occupied by Captain Reeger. It was better than the dungeon from which they had escaped, but it was also stronger. Though there were port holes opening from the sides of the ship, they were covered with heavy iron bars, bolted into the wood. To get out the lads would have to pass through the commander's room, and they did not doubt but that a guard would be stationed there all the while.

They were thrust into the now dark cabin, and the door was closed and bolted. Discouraged over their failure Jack and Nat sat down on chairs.



It was so dark now that it was impossible to see across the small cabin where they were confined. They could hear persons moving about in the other apartment through which they had been brought to their prison.

"I suppose Captain Reeger's having his supper now," observed Nat.

"Most likely," agreed Jack. "Wish we were."

But several hours passed, and no one came near them. The ship kept on, though of course they could not tell where they were bound.

Suddenly the door of their cabin opened. A flood of light from the room of Captain Reeger nearly blinded them. They saw several hanging lamps lighted, and a table spread with a bountiful meal.

"Boys, I'd like to have you take supper with me," said the commander. "I don't like to eat alone. Jupe, put chairs for the young gentlemen."

Jupe, smiling broadly, so that his big white teeth looked, in his expanse of black face, like a row of gravestones on a dark night, set two chairs at the table across from the commander of the *Polly Ann*.

"Sit up, boys," invited Mr. Reeger. "I know



I'm hungry, and I hope you are, for Jupe has a good meal here."

The boys hardly knew what to make of the odd conduct of the captain. A few hours before he had harshly ordered them locked up. Now he invited them to dine with him. Did this presage their release? They hoped so.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### A SIGNAL OF DISTRESS

THE meal was a good one, and, in spite of the uncertainties of their position the two captive lads enjoyed it. Jupe bustled about, here and there, seeing that their plates were kept filled, and attending to the captain. Jack decided there would be no better time than the present to venture one or two questions.

"We're having pretty good weather now; aren't we?" he began.

"Very fair, yes, very fair," replied the commander.

"Do you think it will get rougher when we get beyond Long Island?"

The captain started, and looked closely at Jack. A strange look came into his eyes.

"How do you know we are going beyond Long Island?" he inquired.

"That's what I want to know," spoke Jack quickly. "Look here, Captain Reeger, you've



been kind to us — lately — and I think you might at least tell us where we're bound."

"Besides you haven't any right to take us off," added Nat.

"I know that," was the rather unexpected answer. "I'm sorry, but it can't be helped."

"I don't see why not," said Jack. "You can easily enough set us ashore."

"I wish I could," murmured the commander, and Jack and Nat wondered then, why he did not. Clearly there was more of a mystery than they suspected. The captain wanted to let them go, yet dare not! Who was the person who exercised such power over him? Was it Lavine or Hemp Smith?

"Then can't you tell us where we are going?" continued Jack. "Surely, even if we are to be kept prisoners, until that rascally gang gets rid of the printing plant, you might tell us where we're being taken."

"Do you know of the printing plant?" asked Captain Reeger quickly.

"We certainly do," replied Nat. "We happened to stumble in on it," and he could not help smiling at the recollection of the manner in which he and Jack had fallen into the cave.



"I'm sorry, but I can't tell where you are being taken," was the commander's slow answer. "I can assure you of this, however, that no harm will come to you as long as you do not try to escape."

"And if we do?" asked Jack.

"I shall have to restrain you with force, that's all. But I hope there will be no necessity for that."

"We'll not promise," went on our hero. "We're going to escape if possible."

"I don't know as I blame you," was the answer from this rather strange man who was in charge of the ship. "I'd probably do the same. Only I'll stop you if I can."

"Then it's an even contest," spoke Nat.

"How did Jerry Chowden come aboard?" went on Jack, in an effort to learn as much as possible about the situation.

"That is another thing I am not at liberty to tell you," was the reply. "You had better not ask any more questions, boys, for I'll not answer them. Sufficient to say that you're booked to stay aboard for some time yet, and that you'll be treated well — under certain conditions. That's all I can say. Jupe, you may bring in the pudding, and have plenty of sauce with it."

"Pudding," murmured Jack. The captain was



certainly not sparing anything, in the way of food, to make their enforced stay pleasant. The colored man came in with a big dish that had a savory smell, and the boys were helped liberally.

"We'll be off Montauk Point soon," said the commander, when the meal was finished. "I hope you boys are not subject to seasickness."

"Why?" asked Nat, who had not traveled much on the ocean.

"Because it's usually quite rough off the point, and it seems to be blowing up a bit."

"I guess we can stand it," remarked Jack.

"Well, if you find the schooner pitching and tossing considerably don't be alarmed," said Captain Reeger. "I have to lock you up, you know."

"Couldn't you let us stay outside?" asked Nat.

"I will, if you give me your word that you will not try to escape."

"We'll not promise," put in Jack quickly.

"We appreciate what you've done, Captain, but we can't promise."

"Very well," was the rather cold answer. "I shall have —"

Before the commander had a chance to finish the sentence the door of the cabin was opened, and Nick stepped inside. He appeared surprised at seeing the boys seated at the captain's dining table.



"Well?" inquired Captain Reeger sharply. "What is it?"

"The mate sent me to call you, sir," replied Nick. "He says he doesn't like the looks of the weather."

"All right. I'll come on deck. Now you boys can get back to your cabin," went on the captain, and he spoke so harshly that Jack and Nat were amazed. "And you'd better make up your minds not to escape," he added. "For you'll find I'm a rough old sea dog — there's none rougher on these waters when I'm roused, and it will go hard with you. Back to your cabin now. Jupe, double bar that door, and if you hear them making any noise, call me. There'll be someone on guard in here, so you'd better behave yourselves. I've had 'em in here to question 'em," the captain added to Nick, "but they're sullen young cubs. I can get nothing from them."

"Leave that to Lavine and Hemp Smith," answered, Nick, with a laugh. "They'll make 'em know what's what."

"We're not afraid of either of those cowards!" exclaimed Jack. "Why don't they fight fair. I'll meet either or both of them in a fair contest. They're coward's just like you, and Jerry Chowden, and the rest of the rascally gang."



"You keep a civil tongue in your head or I'll —"

Nick strode forward.

"That'll do here!" interrupted the captain sharply. "This is my cabin, and I'm giving orders on this ship. You can go on deck," he added significantly to Nick. "I'll manage these boys."

He seemed anxious to get the prisoners away, and his manner had undergone a curious change.

"Lock 'em up, Jupe," he ordered.

"This way, gen'men," spoke the colored man softly, opening the door of the cabin that was to be the prison of the two lads. Jupe seemed afraid to come too close to Jack and Nat.

"You're a coward, and you know it," called Jack tauntingly to Nick. The man turned, his face red with anger, but a warning look from Captain Reeger stopped him, and he went out. A little later Jack and Nat were locked in the inner cabin, but Jupe lighted a lamp for them.

"Well this is worse and more of it," remarked Nat. "Slathering slumpledubs! But what made you speak so to Nick?"

"I wanted to make him mad, and attack us. Then there'd be a fine row, and, during the con-



fusion we might get away. I'm not afraid to fight him. Both together we could do him."

"Maybe; if the captain and Jupe didn't take a hand, to say nothing of that giant of a mate."

"I don't believe the captain would lay a hand on us. As for Jupe, we've got him scared. He's superstitious, like many colored men, and if we could play a couple of queer jokes on him, and make him believe we possessed mysterious powers, I think we could make him do whatever we wanted him to do."

They made a careful examination of the cabin, but they soon decided that the only way out was through the door, and that was so heavy and thick, and so well fastened that it seemed unlikely that they could open it. Besides, their knives, and the button hook Jack had used, had been taken from them.

"Guess we'll have to stay until they let us out," was Jack's opinion.

As the night advanced the storm, which had been threatening for some time, broke in a sudden burst of wind and rain, and soon quite a sea was kicked up. The *Polly Ann* pitched and tossed, rolling in the trough of the big waves now and again, until, if the boys had not had strong heads and stomachs, they would have been very seasick.



As it was they were glad to get into the bunks and stay there.

"We must have hit Montauk Point that time," remarked Jack, as there came a particularly violent pitch of the vessel.

"We hit something," answered Nat sleepily. "If the ship goes down I hope they let us out of here."

"I guess there's no danger," came from Jack. They were brave lads, not easily frightened, and what would have alarmed an older person or one less used to knocking about, had no terror for them. They even slept through the worst of the storm.

When morning came Jupe brought them some breakfast.

"Aren't we going to be let out?" asked Nat.

"Did you find out where we're bound for?" added Jack.

"I's might sorry, gen'men," spoke the colored man, visibly embarrassed, "but I done got orders not to speak one word wif yo' all. I's jest got to keep quiet when I's in heah!"

Jupe shook his wooly head solemnly and, having set down the breakfast, departed, locking the door after him.

"You'll have to work the third degree on him," suggested Nat.



"Leave him to me," was all Jack said.

The storm kept up all day, as evidenced by the rolling and pitching of the schooner, and the only person the boys saw was Jupe. He would not talk, and they began to feel quite miserable. True, they had plenty of food, but they were very lonesome. They would gladly have welcomed the appearance of Captain Reeger as a break in the monotony of their captivity. The bull's-eyes in their cabin were of ground glass, and they could not see through them.

Another day passed, and the only person the boys saw was Jupe, though they could hear voices in the captain's cabin. They had no idea where they were, nor in which direction they were sailing.

"I can't stand this any longer!" exclaimed Jack, on the third day of their solitary confinement. "We've got to find some way of escape."

"We've looked everywhere," replied Nat. "The door is solid, so are the walls and the ceiling."

"There's the floor," said Jack quietly. "We haven't looked there. I'm going to have a try. Just put a chair against the door, so they can't open it from the outside, and we'll do a little prospecting."

They braced the door, so it could not readily be



opened, and then, setting the table away from the middle of the room they lifted up the rug, and looked anxiously down. Something met their eyes that caused Jack to give a cautious cheer.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, "We've found it!"

For under the rug was an iron ring, let into a square piece of flooring, which, from the crack all around it, was evidently meant to be lifted up.

"Catch hold there," ordered Jack, and he and Nat inserted their fingers in the ring. They pulled with all their strength.

"She's — coming!" panted Jack, and a moment later the square of flooring came up, revealing a dark hole, with a ladder extending down into it.

"Come on," spoke Jack exultantly.

"Maybe it's dangerous."

"Can't be any worse than staying here."

"But it's dark. We can't see where we're going."

"Take the lamp then."

Nat took the lamp from the hanging ring, lighted it, and followed Jack down the ladder. Though it was daylight, as they could see through the ground glass bulls'eyes, it was very dark in the hole. They soon determined that it was part of the hold of the vessel, though it did not appear to be used. Fortunately Jack knew something of



the construction of ships, and he led the way to a hatchway by which the deck could be reached. They went up a ladder, and, before reaching the deck, paused to listen. They heard no voices, nor any one stirring about.

"We're in luck," whispered Jack. "That hole was there all the while, and we never thought to look."

"How do you suppose it came there?"

"It didn't come. It was made. Probably some of the mystery that seems part of this schooner. Likely they got rid of smuggled goods through that opening. But the question is, what had we better do?"

"Let's chance it," suggested Nat. "They can't do more that put us back. Guess Captain Reeger didn't know about that hole in the floor."

"Probably not. Well, come on."

Cautiously they went on, having blown out the lamp, and left it in the hold. They gained the deck, and, to their surprise, there was no one there. They cast quick looks about. They were on a big expanse of water, the open sea, very likely, and it was so calm that scarcely a ripple disturbed the surface of the ocean. There was only a long, gentle swell, on which the *Polly Ann* rose and fell. Her sails hung limp at the masts, and the booms



swung idly to and fro. It was a dead calm. The man at the wheel was asleep.

"Couldn't be better," whispered Jack. "Now we'll escape."

"Come on, then," urged Nat. "Over to the boat. We'll lower it, and get away."

"No," spoke Jack quickly. "The creaking of the davit pullies would arouse somebody. Besides, we don't know where we are nor which way to row and it would be risky to put off in a small boat, which may have no provisions or water in it."

"What are you going to do then?"

"Hoist a signal of distress," and Jack pointed to a flag at the truck of the mainmast. "We'll lower that and raise it again, union down. Some ship will be sure to see it, and come up to inquire what it means."

"And what'll we do in the meanwhile? Go back to our cabin and wait? If we do Captain Reeger will say the flag was a mistake."

"No, we'll hoist the signal, and then hide here on deck until a ship comes up, and sends a boat. Then we'll jump overboard. There ought to be plenty of steamers about here. There's the smoke of one now," and he pointed to the horizon, where a cloud of dark smoke could be seen.

"Go ahead," said Nat.



Jack stole softly across the deck. He managed to lower the flag without making a noise. Then reversed it and hoisted it to the top of the mast.

"There," he whispered to Nat. "When they see that they'll know something's wrong and come up to see what it is. Now to find a good place to hide. I think in the small boat would be best."



## CHAPTR XXV

### “MAN OVERBOARD”

THE two boys softly crossed the deck to where one of the small boats swung on davits. The rowing craft were covered with canvas, to keep the rain out, and Jack thought that if they could conceal themselves under this they might lie there, undiscovered, until help should come.

They had almost reached the boat when, from behind a deck house, there stepped Jerry Chowden. Whether he or Jack and Nat were the most surprised would be hard to say.

“Why — er — why —” began Jerry.

Neither Jack nor Nat knew what to say. They were dumbfounded. The appearance of Jerry, at this time, meant that their plan would fail.

“How’d you get up here?” asked Jerry.

“Walked,” replied Jack calmly. “Get out of our way,” he added, as if he and Nat had an important errand to do.

“You’re trying to escape!” exclaimed the bully. “I’m going to call Captain Reeger.”



"I wouldn't, if I were you," responded Jack.

"Why not? You're supposed to be kept locked up."

"I guess you didn't hear the latest news then, did you?" asked Jack. A desperate plan had come into his mind. If he could keep Jerry engaged long enough in conversation their signal of distress might be observed, for he could see that the steamer, the smoke of which he had noted before, was coming closer.

"What news?" inquired Jerry, his curiosity getting the better of his suspicions.

"About Lavine and Hemp Smith."

"No. I didn't hear any news. What is it?"

"Come over here and we'll tell you," went on Jack. "It will make quite a difference to Captain Reeger when he hears it."

On the spur of the moment another thought had come to Jack. If he and Nat could get Jerry out of hearing of Captain Reeger and the crew, they might bind and gag the bully, and so prevent his giving the alarm. Jack wanted to get him in a distant corner.

At first Jerry suspected nothing, and he started toward Jack. Then a cunning look came into his eyes.



“I don’t believe you have any news,” he said.  
“It’s a trick.”

“All right, then, if you don’t want to hear it, we’ll go tell Captain Reeger,” answered Jack coolly, as if it did not make the least difference in the world to him. He started toward Jerry. He had resolved on a desperate attempt to frighten the bully into silence, and he knew he could depend on Nat’s help. He cast one look behind him, to see if his chum was at hand, and then he advanced closer toward Jerry.

But something made the latter afraid of Jack. Jerry backed up. As he did so he happened to gaze aloft, and there he saw the reversed flag. A little breeze shook out the folds, and displayed the union down. Then, like a flash, there came to him an idea of what the two prisoners had done.

“You raised that signal!” he cried. “I’m going to tell Captain Reeger!”

“Hold on!” exclaimed Jack, in a desperate effort to stop the disaster which he saw would overtake his plans. “That’s part of the news I’m going to tell you about!”

“No, you don’t!” replied Jerry. “I’m on to your game! You want to catch me! You ran up that signal, and I’m going to warn Captain Reeger!”



"Stop!" commanded Jack so savagely that Jerry involuntarily halted. "If you leave this deck I — we'll — we'll punch you until you're black and blue!" he threatened. "And you know what we can do, too, Jerry Chowden! It won't be the first time I've whipped you!"

Jerry ground his teeth savagely. He hated Jack, and the memory of the punishment our hero had inflicted on him was like bitter medicine to him.

Jack and Nat had so moved about on deck as to get between Jerry and the companion way leading to the captain's cabin. So far they had spoken in low, but tense voices, and no one had come up from below nor had the man at the wheel awakened. For Jerry to rush past them now, to give the alarm, would mean that he would be severely pummeled, and he knew that Jack and Nat, in a short time, before the arrival of help, could inflict dire punishment on him.

He looked about for a way of escape. He caught sight of the approaching steamer. Evidently those on the vessel had seen the signal of distress, for the craft was headed right for the *Polly Ann*. Jack and Nat saw it too, and their hearts beat high with hope. If they could hold off discovery for fifteen minutes longer, and



leave the flag up for that length of time, they might be rescued.

But Jerry was cunning, as well as cruel. He saw the hopeful look the boys cast toward the approaching steamer, and realized what it meant. He looked past his tormentors. They were determined not to let him get by them without a fight. But Jerry had an idea. He was standing near the mast from which flew the reversed signal. He stepped to the ropes, with the evident intention of lowering the reversed emblem.

“Don’t you dare touch that!” cried Jack. “If you do —”

But Jerry had already loosened the lines from the holding cleat. The flag was coming down.

Hardly thinking of what he was doing Jack rushed at the bully. Jerry retreated, until he was against the rail of the schooner, on the port side. Jack followed him, endeavoring to control his temper, which had quickly risen as he saw his plans thus spoiled.

“You — you miserable coward!” he exclaimed to Jerry. “Why don’t you give us half a chance! When we get away from here —”

He took another step toward Jerry.

“Don’t you dare hit me!” whined the bully. “I’ll tell Captain Reeger on you.”



Jack's fists were clenched. Nat came up, hoping they might yet scare Jerry into silence. The steamer was drawing nearer. The reversed flag had caught at half-mast and hung there.

Jerry aimed a blow at Jack. It was only a half-hearted effort, but the bully's fist landed on Jack's cheek. This was too much for our hero. Jack would give him all he wanted of that. Jack drew back his fist and sent a terrific blow in for Jerry's head. The bully tried to dodge, but was not quick enough.

Jack's fist caught him full on the chin. It seemed to fairly lift Jerry from his feet, in which action he himself half aided by jumping up to avoid the blow.

But he went too far, and, partly from his own spring, and partly from the blow, he toppled backward, over the railing. The next instant he had fallen into the sea with a great splash.

"Man overboard! Man overboard!" cried out Larson, the mate, coming on deck at that juncture, and Jack and Nat looked around to see him throwing off his coat and vest as he leaped to the side of the schooner.

There was a rush of feet and Captain Reeger and Nick, followed by others of the crew, hastened on deck. At the same moment Jack looked at the



signal of distress. It was slowly fluttering to the foot of the mast, and those aboard the steamer on which his hopes depended, seeing the signal lowered, put her again on her course. Jack's plan had failed.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### MYSTERIOUS HAPPENINGS

OVER the side went Larson. Jack and Nat hurried to the rail to watch the rescue, nor did Captain Reeger, who must have been greatly surprised to see his prisoners on deck, order them away.

"How did it happen? Who is it?" asked the commander quickly.

"I knocked Jerry overboard," replied Jack.

"What for?"

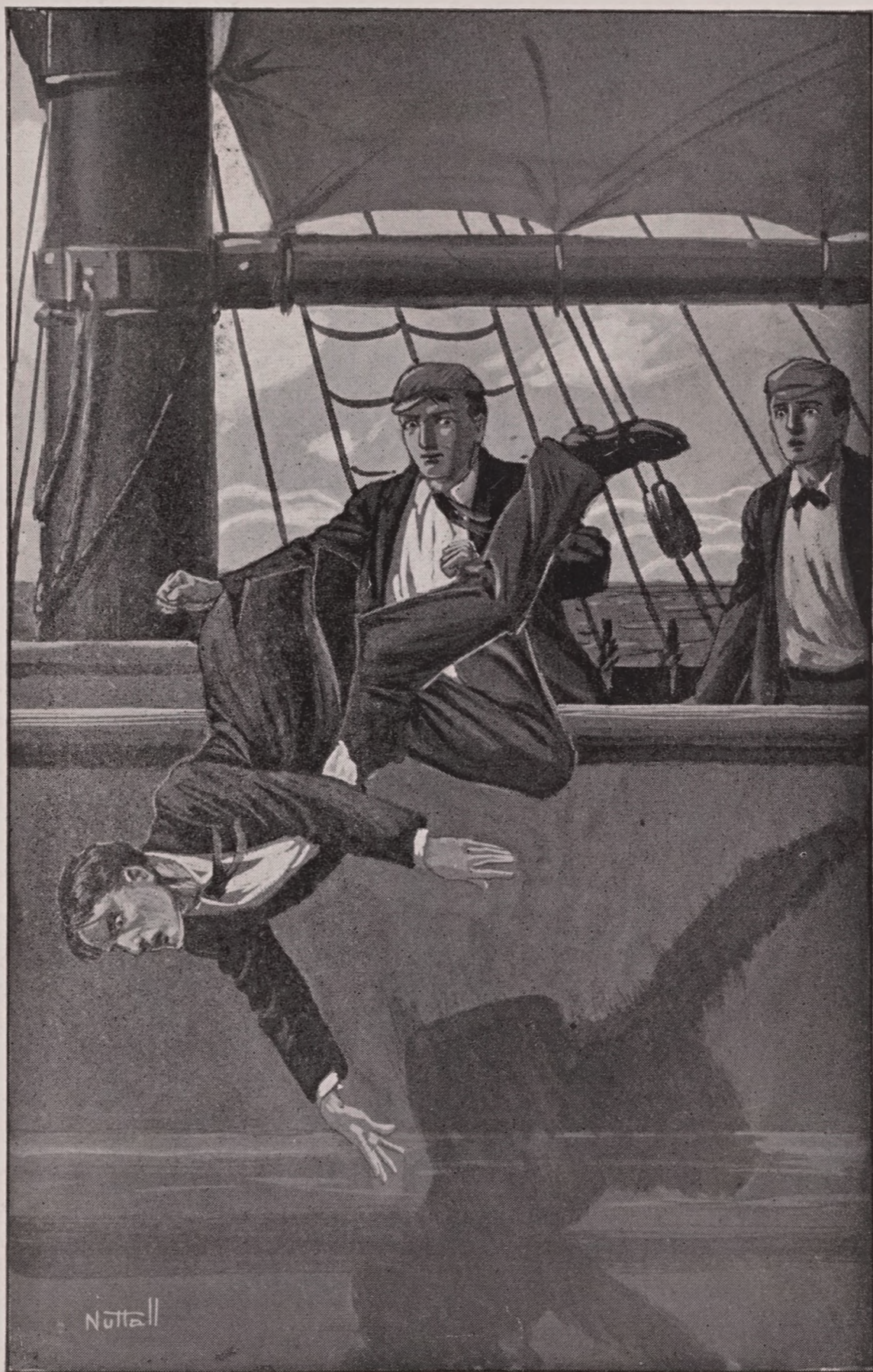
"He was taking my signal down."

"Your signal?"

"Yes, we were going to leave you." And Jack smiled grimly as he motioned to the flag now on deck.

Captain Reeger understood, but he said nothing more just then. He was too anxious about Jerry, for, though he did not like the bully, he did not want to see any harm come to him. Besides, Jerry was aboard as the representative of Lavine,





“The next instant he had fallen into the sea with a great splash”

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and there were peculiar reasons why Captain Reeger did not want to displease the rascally promoter.

"I wonder if Larson can get him," murmured Jack, as he saw the head of the bully rise from the water. "Shall I jump in? I didn't mean to send him overboard."

"Larson will get him, if anyone can," replied the captain. "He's an expert swimmer. Guess Jerry isn't much hurt. He's striking out."

This was so. Jerry was no milksop, in spite of his bullying tactics, and though he was a trifle dazed by Jack's blow, the sudden dip into the water revived him. He knew enough to hold his breath, and as soon as he came to the surface, he struck out. Still he might have had a hard time getting to safety, as his clothes held him down, had it not been for the big mate, who reached and supported him. It was fortunate that the sea was calm.

In a little while the two were at the side of the ship, and had grasped ropes the crew hastily lowered. Jerry was able to pull himself up, and Larson followed.

"I'll get even with you for this, Jack Ranger!" exclaimed the bully, as soon as he recovered his breath. "You tried to kill me!"



"I did nothing of the sort," replied Jack. "I meant to hit you, for interfering with me, and for striking me, but I didn't mean to send you overboard."

"Yes, you did, too! You wait! I'll tell Mr. Lavine!"

Jack shrugged his shoulders and turned away. There was little use in continuing a conversation under such circumstances.

"I must know more about this," spoke Captain Reeger sternly. "How did you boys get up on deck, and what happened?"

"I warned you we'd try to escape," said Jack with a smile. He was beginning to accept his fate philosophically.

"Larson, go below and see how they got out," ordered the commander.

"Oh, I'll tell you," spoke Jack. "We found a hole in the floor, and climbed down into the hold."

"A hole in the floor! I never knew it was there!"

"Neither did we until we looked and found it. It's there all right."

"Strange," murmured Captain Reeger. "Lavine should have told me about it. He knows the schooner better than I do."



Then he turned to Jack and Nat, and seemed sorry that he had spoken thus in their hearing.

"Come below," he said. "I want to talk to you. Jerry, you had better get dry clothes on. And there must be no more of this fighting, do you hear, Jerry? If anything happens, call me."

"I wanted to, Captain, but they wouldn't let me. Then I thought of lowering the flag, and I did. The steamer stopped coming toward us then."

"What steamer?"

Jerry pointed to the vessel that had veered off.

"Humph!" exclaimed the captain. Evidently he was not a little impressed by Jack's expedient.

"Come to my cabin," he said, leading the way.

When Jack and Nat were in the captain's apartment, the commander, taking a seat near them, and locking the door, said:

"Don't you think you two had better give me your parole that you will not attempt to escape?"

"Do you think we had?" inquired Jack.

"I do, for this reason. That if you don't I shall have to put you two into the brig, much as I dislike it. And I hardly need say that you'll not get out of there. Come, now, you had better give me your word. If you do, I'll promise to give you the run of the ship."



Jack seemed to be thinking.

"How long are we likely to be held prisoners?" he asked.

"I can't tell you," replied the captain frankly. "I am waiting orders from Lavine. I may as well tell you that. We are cruising off here, waiting for him."

"Suppose I give you a promise good for a week?" asked Jack.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Nat and I will promise not to try to get away for seven days. At the end of that time we'll decide whether we want to try it again, and, if we do, we'll give you fair warning."

"That's all right," agreed the captain readily. "It is understood that for at least a week you'll not try to escape."

"Unless we are taken off the ship before then," stipulated Jack. "If Lavine comes for us, and takes us to some other place, it's all off."

"Of course. You're only bound by your word to me. It only applies to this ship."

"That's a go," declared Jack firmly. "Eh, Nat?"

"Whatever you say," replied Jack's chum, but he was not a little mystified as to what plan his



companion had in mind, for it needed but a look at Jack to show that he had some scheme in his head. There was a repressed excitement in his manner, and an expectant look in his eyes.

"Then that's settled," remarked Captain Reeger. "You can come up on deck now. I'll explain to Nick, and the members of my crew, that you are to have the run of the ship for a week, on condition of your promise."

"Then we're not to be put back in prison?" asked Jack.

"No, I'll give you a nice stateroom off by yourselves, and you can do as you please."

"We don't care where it is," answered Nat, "as long as it isn't near Jerry Chowden. We'd be always scrapping."

"You'll not be near him. I don't like him any more —"

But at that point the captain seemed to think better of what he was about to say, and stopped suddenly.

"If you'll come with me," he went on, "I'll take you to your stateroom."

The boys were soon ushered into a neat little apartment with two bunks, a table, chairs and a small bathroom opening from it.



"This is what I want!" exclaimed Jack. "A bath! I haven't had one since we went in swimming back at camp."

"Camp!" repeated Nat. "That reminds me. I wonder what has become of Sam, Bony and Budge?"

"I guess they'll get along," replied Jack. "Only they must be puzzled to know what became of us."

"I should say so! I wish we could see them again."

"Maybe we will — soon," spoke Jack, as Captain Reeger went up on deck, telling Jack and Nat to follow when they got ready.

"Say, Jack," exclaimed his chum, "what do you mean by giving your word not to try to escape? We may have a good chance and it would be too bad to miss it."

"We'll have a better one if my plan works."

"How's that?"

"You watch and you'll see. I need the run of the ship to accomplish it, and the only way I can get it is to give my word. There's going to be some queer doings aboard the *Polly Ann* soon, and we'll have a hand in 'em."

"What sort of doings?"

"Doings that will make that colored cook think



he's seeing things daytimes as well as nights. Nat, I depend on him to help us escape, but first I've got to get him in the right frame of mind. You'll have to help."

"Twisted toothpicks! that suits me! The sooner the quicker."

When Jack and Nat went up on deck, after quite a long talk in their new cabin, they were observed curiously by the crew, but no one spoke to them. Jerry was not in sight. The boys took advantage of their freedom to wander about the schooner. It was a trim little craft, and a beauty for sailing. The wind had sprung up since Jerry's unexpected bath, and the ship was slowly slipping through the blue water. The two captives looked about, but there were no other vessels in sight.

Jack and Nat strolled into the galley, where Jupe was busy among pots and pans.

"Well, Jupe," observed Jack, with a wink at Nat, "I told you we'd soon be free, and now we're going to get ready to sink the ship."

"Deed an' is yo'-all gwine to do dat?" asked the colored man. "I s'pects I'd better tell Cap'n Reeger."

He started from the galley, evidently very much in earnest.

"Well, maybe if you'll feed us well we'll not



do it," stipulated Jack, who had his own reasons for becoming friendly with the cook.

" 'Deed den, an' I will, Massa Jack! But doan't yo'-all go fo' to sink dis ship! Dis cook cain't swim."

" Well, all right, we'll not. But what's that in your hair, Jupe? "

" In mah ha'r, Massa Jack? 'Deed an' dere ain't nuffin in mah ha'r."

" Well, there certainly is; something big and white," insisted Jack. " Isn't there, Nat? "

Nat nodded, and the colored man put his hand up to his woolly pate. He felt nothing.

" Guess yo'-all is tryin' to fool dis chile," he said with a grin.

" No, I'm not. Look there, you've got an egg in your hair," and, showing his hand, seemingly empty, Jack reached up and apparently took an egg from the negro's head. It was a simple sleight-of-hand trick.

" Good land! How'd dat git dere? " asked Jupe in great astonishment.

" I expect a hen must have laid it there," replied Jack. " Here, take it, and make another pudding with it."

He held the egg out to the cook, who reached



out his hand for it, when, to his surprise, it turned into a quarter of a dollar, which Jack gravely deposited in his palm.

"Well, well, Jupe, there are mysterious goings on in your galley," commented Nat. "An egg in your head, and it turns to money."

"Good land a' massy!" cried Jupe, "dis galley am suttinly bewitched! Heah! I doan't want this yeah money!"

"Oh, it's yours; you've got to keep it," declared Jack. "You didn't know we were magicians; did you?"

"No. Is yo'-all?"

"Surely," replied Jack gravely. "Aren't we, Nat?"

"Of course."

"What's that growing out of this potato?" went on Jack, picking one up from the basinful Jupe was peeling.

"Dere ain't nuffin growin' outer dat potato, Massa Jack."

"Why, yes, there is! Another quarter! I declare, Jupe, you'll be rich if you keep on."

The colored man scratched his head in amazement. Certainly strange things were happening. Jack handed him the money.



"I done 'spects it'll turn inter a pussy cat, er a mouse purty soon," he observed.

"No, that's good money," declared Jack, as he and Nat left the galley. "We'll see you again."



## CHAPTER XXVII

### IN A HEAVY STORM

THOSE were only the first of the queer tricks that Jack played on Jupe. That same day a fine pudding, intended for the evening meal, disappeared from the galley, right under the eyes of the cook. He reported the occurrence to Captain Reeger, but did not dare mention that he suspected the boy "magicians," as he styled them, of having a hand in it.

"Dey suah am a ghostest in ma galley," he declared.

"Nonsense," said the captain. "Probably some of the sailors stole it when you weren't looking."

"But dey couldn't, Cap'n. I set it down fer jest a minute to cool, an' I turned around. When I turned back it were gone, an' dere wa'ant nobody neah de galley."

"Are you sure you made a pudding?"

"Sartin suah, Cap'n."



"Well, say nothing about it. I may be able to discover who took it."

This was only the beginning. The experience the two lads had had at Washington Hall, in playing tricks and jokes, stood them in good stead in their campaign against Jupe. Before three days had passed Jupe was ready to believe anything the boys told him. And he dared not disclose to Captain Reeger how afraid he was of them, for they threatened him with dire punishment if he did.

"Well, have you made your plans?" asked Nat of Jack one night in their cabin, after they had scared Jupe by causing mysterious raps to sound in his bunk room, where, because of his color, he had a place to himself, away from the other sailors.

"Yes, I'm almost ready to get away from here, Nat. I want to perfect a few points, and then I'm going to notify Captain Reeger that our week is up."

"I suppose he'll put us in some place that'll be hard to get out of."

"He'll have to be pretty cute if he does. I've even arranged to get out of the brig, if he puts us there. But I don't think he will. I fancy



there'll be something doing in a few days more, that may make a change in his plans."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I rather think he expects a message from Lavine. You know we've been cruising back and forth, near the same spot, for the last two days. We haven't gone ten miles in a straight direction without tacking back. I think the captain has orders to wait around here for word from the gang, in case he did not hear from them before."

"Maybe you're right. Will that make any difference to you?"

"It may make it necessary to get away quicker, but I think we can manage it. Jupe will do anything I tell him now. He'd even go with us if we wanted him to."

"You're going in the boat; aren't you?"

"Yes, if Lavine doesn't show up before we can get away, and spoil my plans."

The boys had passed a not unpleasant time on the ship since giving their parole. The weather was fine, and there was nothing for them to do, save rest in the shade on deck, and eat their meals. Of course, their tricks on Jupe kept them occupied part of the time, and they laid their plans so well that no one suspected them.

They only had occasional glimpses of Jerry.



He seemed to want to avoid them, and never would come on the same part of the deck where they were.

Two days later, when Jupe had found a note inside some dough he was mixing for bread, telling him to obey without question the orders of the "two young magicians," Jack told Nat that all was in readiness.

"Are you going to notify the captain that we intend to escape?"

"Sure. I don't believe he can stop us now."

But something higher in power than the commander of the *Polly Ann* was to interfere with Jack's plans.

After supper that night Jack approached the captain, who was at the wheel.

"Why, you're sailing north-east!" exclaimed Jack, as he looked at the compass, which he could read.

"That's what," admitted the captain, in a friendly voice, for of late he had been quite kind to the boys, though at times he was harsh. "And I don't mind telling you that I wish I wasn't."

"Why?"

"Because there's a storm brewing, and it's likely to be a bad one."



"Where are we bound for? But I suppose you won't tell?"

"Yes, I don't mind. Things have changed a bit. Lavine was to meet me off here, if he wanted me to put in shore and turn you over to him. But he hasn't, and in that case, I was to proceed to a port in Maine. Part of my agreement with him was to the effect that you might now be told this much, and also send word to your parents that you were all right. But you can't tell them where you are, or where you are bound. In fact, I shan't tell you that last, so you won't know."

"Can we really send word home?" asked Jack eagerly.

"Yes, but I must see the message."

"I suppose so. Whereabouts are we now?"

"About five miles off Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I've got orders to send a man in with a boat, to take your messages."

"Then we'll write 'em at once. This is good news — almost as good as being allowed to go. Are you going to wait for the man you send ashore in the boat?"

"No. He's going to take a little gasoline gig we've got aboard, and he'll meet Lavine. We're to keep right on to a certain place in Maine. Then, I expect you'll be allowed to go."



"Maybe we'll go sooner than that."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded the captain angrily.

"I mean that the week is up, and we're on parole no longer," said Jack fearlessly. "We're going to leave you at the first opportunity."

The captain started.

"So you think you can get away from me; eh?" he asked with a leer. "Well, I'll show you that you're mistaken. I'll clap you into the brig, that's what I'll do!"

He had turned ugly almost in a moment. Jack could hardly understand it, but he was prepared for the worst. Jupe had promised to help them escape, even from the brig.

"Write your messages, and then get below!" ordered the captain harshly. "I'll fix you! I'm a tough old sea dog, as tough a one as ever sailed! I'll fix you!"

Jack and Nat entering a deck house, wrote brief messages to the folks at home, telling that they were safe, and soon expected to be with them. They knew it would be useless to give any details. The captain took the telegrams, and then, calling Nick, sent the two prisoners below.

"See that they're locked in well," ordered the



commander. "They think they can escape. I'll show 'em!"

In the brig, which was now their dungeon, the boys heard the puffing of the little gasoline launch as it left the schooner. The ship was then put before the wind, and forged ahead under a spanking breeze, which seemed to increase every minute.

"Say, it's coming on to blow," observed Nat to Jack, in their small and uncomfortable prison.

"Yes. I expect we'll get a storm. But never mind, the small boat's staunch. We'll risk putting off in her."

The pitching and tossing of the schooner increased, and even below deck as they were, the two boys knew that the storm was rapidly getting worse.

"Do you think we dare chance it?" asked Nat.

"Got to. It's our only hope. Jupe'll be here about midnight to let us out. He's managed to get a duplicate key. I told him if he didn't we'd haunt his galley forever."

"And after we get out?"

"We'll hide on deck until daylight, and make a dash to get away in the boat when the dog watch changes. Jupe will help us. He's promised, under penalty of being turned into a goat."

Several hours passed. The wind became a gale,



and the manner in which the ship rose on the crests, and then shot down into the hollows, told that the waves must be very high.

"I don't believe we'll dare chance it," said Nat.

"Maybe not. If it's too rough for the small boat, we'll have to wait until to-morrow night, though I don't fancy staying here all day."

There was no doubt but what Captain Reeger's anticipation, that they were to have bad weather, was fully verified. It seemed as if the sea and the wind were combining to do their worst and thwart the efforts of the two lads.

"There's one consolation," observed Nat. "Our folks will know we're all right; that is, if those telegrams get off."

"Oh, I fancy he'll send 'em. He wouldn't gain anything by holding 'em back, especially after it was his own proposition. But it must be close to midnight. I wish Jupe'd come."

"Hark! Some one is coming," said Nat, and the two boys listened, straining to catch some sound above the howl of the storm.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### JACK SAVES THE CAPTAIN

THERE was a rattling at the door of the brig in which they were confined. Some one seemed to be manipulating the lock. Jack sprang to the door.

"Who's there?" he cautiously whispered.

"It's me, Massa Jack," replied Jupe's voice through the keyhole. "I's heah! I'm gwine to open de do' but, fo' de good land a' massy doan't turn me inter a goat! I doan't laik goats."

"Open the door and you'll be all right," replied Jack. "How's the weather?"

"Pow'ful bad, Massa Jack. Pow'ful bad."

"Can we get away?"

"I's afraid not. De wind am suffin tremendous, an' de waves mighty nigh swamped de schooner. Dere, I's got dat lock open at las'. But doan't yo'-all go fo' to tell de cap'n dat I let yo' out, er he'll lambaste me."

"We'll not tell," Nat assured him. "Here, lock the door again, and put the key where you got



it. He'll think we turned into smoke and got out through the keyhole."

"He suah will," replied Jupe, as he locked the door. "Now wait jest a minute befo' yo'-all comes on deck, so's to gib me a chance to put dis key back, an' git to mah bunk. Den he won't suspect me."

"All right," agreed Jack. "Hurry, though, we want to get away."

"Pow'ful bad time to leave a ship," murmured Jupe, as he disappeared in the semi-darkness of the hold where the brig was located.

"Well, we're out, at any rate," observed Nat.

"Yes, but I'm afraid it isn't going to do us much good. Say, this is a fierce storm!"

Now that they were out of their small prison they could hear more plainly the creaking and groaning of the ship's timbers as the waves buffeted her about. The schooner seemed to be on her beams' ends several times, but she managed to right herself. Then she would bury her nose in a big wave, and appear about to go down to the bottomless depths. But, somehow, she managed to stagger up again, and continue on.

"We can't get away from here in a small boat," said Nat, as he clung to a stanchion to keep his balance.



"Wait until we get up on deck and take a look around," suggested Jack. "It may not be as bad as it seems. It doesn't take much of a blow to make a small schooner like this dance about."

"But it will make a little boat dance worse."

"Well, we'll take a look." Jack did not like to give up a plan, once he had started on it, no matter what the danger.

The two boys listened. There were no sounds to be heard save the noise of the ship and the howl of the storm. Their escape had not been discovered, nor, they thought, was it likely to be very soon, for the attention of captain and crew was devoted to the ship.

"Come on," said Jack grimly, as he led the way to the deck. They were both familiar with every part of the ship now, having had the run of it for a week.

When they got outside, having emerged near the forecastle companionway, they were met with the full force of the storm. A strong wind whistled around them, and a dash of rain nearly blinded them. It needed but a glance ahead, at the big waves, which every moment threatened to engulf the schooner, to tell them that to risk an escape in a small boat would be utter folly. A



little craft could not live for a moment in those tremendous seas.

The *Polly Ann* seemed rushing at a big black wall, but which the boys knew was a mountain-high wave. It looked as if the small vessel would be dashed to pieces. But, ever as she was urged on by what little of the storm sails were displayed to the wind, she rose gracefully, and rode over the crest of the mass of water.

Then came a descent on the other side, with the ship coasting on a smooth hill of foam, which hissed and seemed to reach up big, watery arms to pull her down. But the *Polly Ann* kept on. Her lights shone bravely out, and her staunch planks defied the battering of the waves. Her reefed sails, reduced to mere rags, held out against the powerful gusts, and though the rain came down like hail on her decks, the stout planks and the battened hatches kept those below dry and safe.

There was no one on deck but the steersman, as Jack and Nat could see by a glance aft. The man, clad in yellow oilskins, was like a bronze statue, in the glare of the binnacle lamp, as he stood, with feet braced wide apart, to better hold the wheel which turned first one way, then the other, as the waves battered against the rudder.



"We can't get away to-night," said Nat, speaking aloud in Jack's ear, for one had almost to shout to be heard above the tempest.

"No," answered Jack. "But we'll stay here until morning. Maybe there'll be a chance then. We must find some place where they won't locate us."

He had thought of this emergency in planning the escape, and he led the way to a small compartment, flush with the forward deck that closed in the forecastle, but which had an opening not far from the fore hatch. It had originally been used to house a donkey engine, when the schooner was in trade, but the machinery had been taken out, and the space left would hold two or three lads comfortably. Jack had seen this, when roaming about the ship, and, as it was not kept locked, he decided to use it, if necessary.

The time had now come when it could be put to use, and he and Nat crawled in and closed the sliding door. It was not even as comfortable as the brig had been, for they were more subjected to the pitch and roll of the ship, and the place, from disuse, had not been kept in repair, so that it leaked quite badly.

The wind, which was cold, in spite of the fact



that it was summer, searched out many a crack, as did the rain, and the two lads were soon nearly wet through and shivering.

"Thumping thingamabobs!" exclaimed Nat. "There's a stream of water trickling down my back."

"Never mind," consoled Jack. "It might be worse. I hope this storm lets up by daylight."

"Supposing it doesn't?"

"I don't know what we'll do. Have to stay here, I reckon, though they'll probably find us, for they'll make a careful search. If they don't, we'll stay here until we have a chance to get away. Luck seems to be against us."

"It sure does," agreed Nat. "But can we stay here without anything to eat?"

"Wouldn't you starve for one day, for the sake of getting away from here?"

"Of course. But it's mighty uncomfortable."

Through the storm rushed the *Polly Ann*. She seemed to bid defiance to the elements. The boys, from their hiding place, could catch no glimpse of the riot of wind, wave and rain, but they could feel from the tremors of the ship, that she was plowing her way through a mass of tumultuous water.

"I wonder where we are now?" asked Nat,



after they had crouched in silence for awhile, during which time more rain came in, and the wind seemed to blow harder than ever.

“Must be quite a way up the Maine coast by now. We’ve been scooting along at a good rate, and we were off Portsmouth some time ago. But it doesn’t make much difference where we are — it’s what’s going to happen to us. I don’t believe this storm is going to let up inside of two or three days.”

“And we can’t stay here all that while.”

“No, I suppose not,” was Jack’s rather gloomy answer.

There came, if possible, a louder howling of the gale, a fiercer burst of rain, and the ship seemed to receive a blow from a wave that set her aback. At the same moment there sounded the shrill cry of the helmsman.

“Something’s happened,” said Jack quickly, as he pulled back the sliding door of their hiding place.

There was a rush of feet on deck, plainly heard, as there now came a lull in the storm. Lights gleamed here and there, and, because of the foam-capped waves, and what seemed to be a phosphorous glow to the water, the scene on deck was visible to the two lads.



They saw Captain Reeger, clad in his oilskins, and followed by the big, Swedish mate, rush to the mainmast. Then came the commander's hoarse voice calling:

"All hands on deck to repair damage!"

"Come on!" cried Jack.

"They'll see us and catch us."

"What of it? Something's happened, and they may need our help! There isn't a very large crew on board. Come on!"

Thus urged, Nat followed Jack from the former engine house. They could see a cluster of figures about the mainmast, and from the sailors' activity, it seemed as if something had happened to the gaff and boom.

As the two boys rushed forward, not caring whether or not they were observed, they saw that the burst of wind had torn the sail loose, and that the canvas was flapping about in the gale while the big boom was swinging to and fro, like an immense flail, threatening all in its path.

"Cut the ropes! Lower the throat and peak halyards!" cried Captain Reeger. "Get it out of the way! Look out for the boom! Take a turn with a rope around it, some of you, and make it fast. It'll tear the mast out if you don't!"

The men labored heroically, but it was hard



work, for the ship, made more unsteady by the loss of the driving power of the mainsail, had fallen off, and was almost in the trough of the sea.

The boys were now close to the scene of wreckage, but no one seemed to notice them. There was nothing they could do, but they stood in readiness.

"Here!" cried the captain suddenly to one of the sailors, "you're cutting the wrong rope!"

He stepped forward to show what he meant, and, without thinking, got right in the path of the swinging boom. An instant later the big piece of timber, swinging in an immense half-circle, swept straight at him.

"Look out!" yelled Jack, and his cry was echoed by all the others. The captain turned to get out of the way, but, just then, a rope, falling from somewhere overhead, struck him, tangled up around him, and held him fast. A moment later and he would be swept overboard by the boom, knocked unconscious, in all likelihood, so that he could not save himself.

Jack took all this in like a flash. He saw the boom swinging toward the captain, and, glancing about for some means of averting the disaster, he saw a strong rope.

He caught it up, and, with a memory of the



skill he possessed with the lasso, which he had learned while on his western trip, he cast a bight of the cable around the end of the boom as it flew past him.

"Here, Nat!" he cried, "catch hold!"

Nat grabbed an end of the rope, and Jack took a turn around a cleat. The rope strained as the force of the flying boom came on it, but the stout hemp held, and the big, swaying timber was stopped when but two feet away from the captain.

He soon freed himself from the entangling rope, stepped out of the way of further danger, and then, when the sailors quickly made fast the boom, he walked up to Jack.

"You saved my life," he said simply, but there were tears in his eyes, and a curious break in his voice.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### CAPTAIN REEGER'S CONFESSION

THE sailors soon made good the damage caused by the blowing away of the sail. Another was hoisted in its place, and even the small area that was displayed made a great difference in the action of the schooner. She swung around before the wind, and was soon flying along as she had been before. The storm, now that the wind and waves had seemingly been satisfied by inflicting as much damage as they could in a short time, appeared to settle down to a steady blow.

"Will you come below with me?" asked the captain of Jack, and he did not mention, what must have been to him a surprise; namely, to see the prisoners free.

Jack and Nat followed the commander to his cabin. It was no easy task to get there, for the ship seemed to be standing at an angle of forty-five degrees most of the time, and the floors sloped correspondingly.

"Sit down," said the commander, when he had



closed the door. "I have something I want to say to you."

"If it's about how we got loose, we're not going to tell you," replied Jack quickly, wishing to shield Jupe.

"I don't care a hang about that, if you'll excuse the slang," spoke the captain. "I'm naturally a plain-spoken person, but of late I've been so badgered about, and kept under—and—and—"

Captain Reeger seemed much excited, and to be laboring under the stress of some feeling. Rising from his chair he began pacing about the cabin, no easy task, either, but he managed to keep his legs, for he was, to use his own expression, an "old sea dog."

"You saved my life just now," he went on, addressing Jack. "If it hadn't been for you I'd be at the bottom of the sea by now."

"Oh, I guess some one else would have caught the boom," answered Jack.

"No matter. You did. That's what counts. I know. I'm not the brute you think I am. I've got feelings. I—I once had a boy like you. He's dead now. Oh! Oh! Why did I ever get in the power of that rascal!" the man exclaimed bitterly, and he sat down in a chair, and covered his face with his hands.



"Can we — that is — what's the — maybe we can help you," spoke Jack sympathetically.

"No one can help me!" exclaimed the captain desperately. "I'm in his power, and I'll be in it until I die! That's what makes me a brute! That's what makes me what I am! Oh! If I could only get free!"

The two boys looked at each other. They were rather alarmed by the captain's manner.

"There!" he said, after a moment. "I'm making a ninny of myself. I'll be better presently. Don't mind me. I brought you here to tell you something," he went on. "Something that concerns you."

"There's no hurry about it," spoke Jack. "We're in no rush. We're all right. We can look after ourselves."

"I should judge so," replied the captain, "from the manner in which you manage to get out, no matter where I put you. But you must have had help this time. Never mind. I'm not asking what it is. I — I just want to tell you that I didn't do this thing of my own choice. I didn't want to keep you aboard here. I don't want to hold you prisoners."

"Then why do you do it?" asked Jack, very naturally.



"Because I can't help myself. I'm in the toils of a villain — as bad a man as ever lived! I can't break away from him! He has me in his power!"

"Is it Lavine?" asked Jack quickly.

"Lavine! Yes! How did you know?"

"I didn't. I just guessed at it, from knowing what sort of a man he is."

"Do you know him?"

"Only since I discovered his bogus printing plant, but my father does. He tried to get my father into trouble, but did not succeed."

"What's that?" cried the commander. "Do you mean to tell me any one could get the best of Jonas Lavine?"

"My father did, and I expect to," replied Jack coolly.

"Then maybe you can help me!" exclaimed the captain. "I'll tell you my story."

"You needn't, if it distresses you," said Jack.

"I don't mind. Especially to the one who saved my life. But, before I begin, I want you boys to understand that I never would have done what I did to you — carry you away in this ship — and treat you as I have — had it not been that Lavine had a hold over me which I could not break. I wanted to be kind to you, but I knew if I did it



would be reported to him, and he would make it all the harder for me. That — that sneak Jerry Chowden is a spy. So is Nick, only he's not so bad. Lavine has some hold over him, too."

This, then, thought Jack, explained the curious moods of the captain — why he was kind at one time, and harsh at another.

"I am in Lavine's power, for a crime I never committed," went on the captain, speaking loudly to be heard above the storm. "Yet he holds evidence, which, if presented in any court, would convict me. I have no witnesses to prove my innocence, but he could make me seem guilty. He laid his plans well. He did so in order that he might get me in his power."

"I have been a sea captain for many years. I used to sail my own vessel, but, through a series of misfortunes, I lost it. Then I had to seek employment. I happened, by accident, to meet Jonas Lavine, when I was looking for a ship. He offered me one, but he wanted me to engage in some illegal work. I refused, and he pretended to give it up. I believed him, and took command of his ship. Then, too late, I found what a scoundrel he was. He had, by a trick, forced me to engage in the very work which I had refused to do."

"After that he had me in his power, for he had



men under him who would swear that I knowingly engaged in unlawful work. I saw no way out. To leave his employment would mean that I never could get any other, for he would keep track of me, and make the false charge against me. There was but one thing to do — to take service under him. Since then I have been employed by him, doing his shady work for him, but this is the worst I ever did — help to kidnap two lads. I objected strongly when I found out what his plan was, but he made me agree to it. He also made me promise to treat you harshly, but I hadn't the heart to do it. Now you know my story. I could not help telling you, after you saved my life, for I want you to understand that I am forced to act as I have."

The captain ceased. Outside sounded the roar of the storm. Jack and Nat, deeply affected by what they had heard, and feeling a great pity for the unfortunate captain, gazed at him curiously.

"Perhaps I can help you," said Jack at length. "My father knows this scoundrel Lavine, and I know Hemp Smith. I could prefer several charges against him, and I will, too, when I get back home. As for Lavine, my father said he was liable to arrest for the swindle he tried to perpetrate on him."



"What's that you say?" asked the captain quickly. "Is Lavine liable to arrest? I didn't know that. I thought he was too foxy ever to be caught."

"My father has evidence against him," went on our hero. "I will ask him to use it, too. Captain," he added quickly, "why can't we work together?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you'll help us, I'll help you. I'll see my father as soon as I get home, and have him prefer charges against Lavine. Then he'll find some way of getting you out of his power. Is it a go? Will you help us if we help you?"

"I will!" cried the captain, extending his hand to his former prisoner. "Jack Ranger, it is a go! We'll work together! You're free! I'll defy Lavine and his tools! There! I feel like a man again. I've been a coward all along. I can't thank you enough. I'll defy him!"

"Then let's get right to work," proposed Jack. "Set us ashore at the nearest port, and I'll telegraph my father."

"We'll make land as soon as this storm lets up," replied the captain. "Boys, you are now free! The run of the ship is yours, and you can escape any time you want to!"



## CHAPTER XXX

### JERRY THREATENS

CAPTAIN REEGER seemed quite a different person now that he had made a confession, and entered into an alliance with Jack, to aid him and Nat. There was a brighter look on his face, and even the danger of the storm did not seem to worry him.

That there was danger was apparent to all, for the commander, after his conference, went on deck, and announced that he intended to remain there until morning.

"Jack, you and Nat can go to your own cabin—the one you had when on parole," he said to the recent prisoners.

"Suppose any one questions us?" asked Jack.

"Send them to me. I'm the boss here."

There was a new decision in the captain's words. He was indeed, as he said, master now, not only of the ship but of himself.

"Well, this is some different, isn't it?" asked Nat, when he and Jack were left alone.



"I should say so. Queer, how it all turned out."

"Oh, it's your usual luck. Look how you got the best of Professor Punjab, *alias* Hemp Smith, when he had stolen the card, without which we never could have gotten to Orion Tevis."

"Well, I am usually pretty lucky," admitted Jack. "I only hope it keeps up, and that we get out of this storm safe. It certainly is a hummer."

But, down in their comfortable cabin, the boys did not notice the blow so much as they had on deck. It was necessary for the crew, under the direction of Captain Reeger, to be on the alert all the while, however, as the least inattention might have sent the schooner to the bottom.

"I vote we go and make Jupe give us something to eat," cried Nat, after a pause. "How about you?"

"I'm with you. Come ahead."

They made their way to where Jupe presided over the galley, for they had heard Captain Reeger say that the cook had been aroused, to make hot coffee for the sailors who were compelled to spend their watch on deck.

"Good land a' massy! What am yo'-all doin' heah?" exclaimed the colored man, when he



caught sight of Jack and Nat. "Has yo' escaped?"

"We concluded to stay on board, so as to get some more of your pudding," explained Jack. "We like it, Jupe."

"But good land a' massy! Ef Cap'n Reeger finds yo'-all heah, what he gwine to do? What he gwine to say? I axes yo'-all dat, an' I wants to know. What he gwine to say? What he gwine to do?"

"Oh, we've put the kibosh on him," explained Nat easily.

"What am dat kibosh?"

"That the same thing as the flipsyflopsydipsydopsy," went on Nat, with a wink at Jack. "We have put a mysterious spell on him, and he can't even see us walking around. Go ahead now, Jupe; give us something to eat. We're starved."

"An has yo'-all done gone an' put a spell on de cap'n?"

"That's what we have."

"Land a' massy! I believe yo' has," remarked the cook, as he poured out some hot coffee for the boys, and set out a plate of sandwiches. "I believe yo'-all has! Yo' boys am capable ob most anyt'ng, yo' suah am!"



It was no easy matter to eat, and at the same time brace against the pitching of the ship, but the two lads managed it. When their hunger was somewhat appeased they left the galley, where it was warm and cosy, and went out on deck. It was all they could do to hold on, so slanting was the vessel, and so strong did the wind blow.

"You'd better go below, boys," called Mate Larson in his hearty tones, as he caught sight of the lads. "You bane blown overboard up here."

"I guess the captain must have told him we were free," said Jack, in Nat's ear. "And I reckon we'd be better off in our cabin."

Through the night the ship labored on. The storm did not abate, and when morning dawned, cold and gray, the *Polly Ann* was still scudding along before the blast, almost under bare poles. The seas were still mountain high, and the wind and rain were as fierce as ever.

"Well, boys, how are you standing it?" asked Captain Reeger, as he came below to snatch a hasty breakfast.

"All right," replied Jack. "I hope you haven't repented of your bargain."

"Not a bit of it. I'm done with Lavine. But I depend on you to help me."



"And we will. How soon do you suppose it will be before we can go ashore and send a message?"

"Some time, I'm afraid. There's no good harbor hereabouts. There are too many islands to risk running in during such a storm as this."

"Did you send those other messages to our folks?" asked Nat.

"I certainly did. I'm a man of my word, even though I did enter into this mean deal against you," as the quick answer.

"How far up do you think we'll have to run?" asked Jack.

"It's hard to say. Pretty well up the Maine coast, I'm afraid. If we get in this side of Eastport we'll be lucky. Well, I must go on deck again. It's getting worse instead of better, if I'm any judge."

The boys got breakfast and then began to think of going on deck again, to look at the weather. They were glad they had not ventured out in the small boat. They probably never would have reached shore.

As they were going along a passageway, intending to ascend the companion stairs and reach the deck, a door of a stateroom near which they were,



opened, and Jerry Chowden thrust his head out.

"You — you here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; any objections?" inquired Jack coolly.

"Why aren't you locked up?" asked the bully.

"Oh, we got tired of it, and concluded to come out."

"I'm going to tell Captain Reeger you've escaped!" declared Jerry. "He'll lock you up again!"

"I don't believe he will," remarked Nat.

"He won't; eh? We'll see about that. I know what orders Mr. Lavine gave about you."

"You ought to. You were sent on board to play the part of a sneak and spy," said Jack in contempt.

"Don't you call me those names!" snapped Jerry.

"They're true," came from Nat.

"I'll fix you!" declared the bully vindictively.

"I'll have you put back in the brig."

He hurried from his cabin, though he was so unused to making his way about the ship when it was tossing thus, that he had to fairly crawl.

"Let's follow and see what he does," suggested Nat, and he and his chum took after the bully.



They saw Jerry climb to the deck, and seek out Captain Reeger. Approaching quite close, they were able to hear what he said:

"Do you know those boys are out?" asked the bully insolently of the commander.

"Yes," was the short answer.

"But you had orders to keep them locked up, and I'm going to tell Mr. Lavine. He'll fix you and them too!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Captain Reeger. "I'd have you know that —"

Then, seeming to feel it beneath his dignity to quarrel with such a fellow as Jerry, he stopped. But Jack understood what he would say. Our hero determined to give Jerry his quietus.

"Look here, Jerry Chowden," he broke in suddenly. "You go below, and don't come up on deck again, until I give you leave!"

"Wha — what?" asked Jerry, too astonished to grasp what Jack said.

"You go below and stay there, I said. If I catch you on deck again, without my permission, I'll give you a worse threshing than the last one, and you know what that means. Now go!"

Jerry could scarcely believe his ears.

"Captain Reeger, I appeal to you," he said.



"I want protection from him. I'll tell Mr. Lavine."

"Don't appeal to me, you — you toad!" exclaimed the commander.

"Tell Lavine!" cried Jack. "His day is over. He hasn't anything more to say."

"He hasn't; eh?" cried Jerry with a sneer. "We'll see about that."

"You go below!" ordered Jack. "Lavine, Hemp Smith and Company haven't any more to say aboard this craft. Clear out now. When we want you we'll send for you!"

Jerry look as if he would resist, but Jack started for him, and with a whining cry the bully turned and ran as well as he could, considering the pitching ship.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE POLLY ANN WRECKED

"THERE," said Jack, with a grim smile, as he turned back, "I don't think he'll bother us again."

"I'm glad you treated him that way," commented the captain. "I wanted to say that, and more, to him, but I don't like to quarrel with boys. It was bad enough to make it hard for you."

"Well, we'll not hold it against you," said Jack; "will we, Nat?"

"No, indeed. But I'm anxious to get ashore. This has been quite an ocean cruise for us, Jack."

"Indeed it has, and, in some ways I'm not sorry it happened."

"I fancy Hemp Smith and Lavine will be, when we get after them," said Nat.

"Yes, but they may escape. They're slippery customers, especially Hemp. I don't know so much about Lavine. By the way, Captain, do you know anything about his printing plant — what he does with it?"

"Not much. Something illegal, you can make



up your mind to that. He couldn't do a straight business if he tried."

During the day there was a little lull in the storm, so it was easier to get about the ship, and the sailors had a chance to make some needed repairs. The two chums saw nothing of Jerry, who evidently took to heart the warning Jack had given him, and kept to his stateroom.

Nick, the other member of Lavine's particular gang, did not say anything to the boys. Captain Reeger informed them that he had told him of allowing the prisoners their freedom, and Nick had expressed his satisfaction. He declared that if the captain would stand by him, he, too, would throw off the yoke of Lavine.

"He didn't treat us so bad," commented Jack. "We'll help him, if we get a chance."

As night again settled down it found a small, weary band of sailors on the *Polly Ann*. They had labored all day, and all the previous night, and they were almost worn out. The storm showed no signs of abating, and the wind chopped around, and blew a regular north-easter, cold and penetrating.

"We're in for another bad night," predicted the captain as he finished his supper, and donned his oilskins, for a long watch on deck.



"Do you think we're in any danger?" asked Jack.

"One always is on the ocean in a storm," was the somewhat solemn answer. "Particularly on this coast. If this wind holds we'll have our own troubles weathering the gale. If we get too close to shore I can't beat off and then —"

"It isn't pleasant to think of," said Jack. "We'll hope for the best."

"That's right," agreed the commander, and he spoke gravely. "Davy Jones is always waiting for new messmates, but maybe we'll fool him this time," and with that he went up on deck.

There was nothing much for the boys to do but go to their berths. They had slept but little the night before, owing to their plan to escape, and to the storm, and they were quite weary. They sat up awhile in their stateroom, discussing the many strange things that had come to pass since they started camping.

"I don't believe we'll sleep much, with the way the *Polly Ann* is carrying on," remarked Jack whimsically. "One would think, by her name, that she was a person in middle life, who had settled down, but she's behaving like a giddy young girl, at her first dance."

"She certainly is dancing," agreed Nat, as he



etched up against a partition with a resounding bang. "But I'm sleepy enough not to mind that."

"I hope it'll be fair weather to-morrow," sighed Jack, as he said good-night to his chum.

How long the boys had been sleeping they did not know, but they were suddenly awakened by feeling a tremendous shock go through the ship. It was as if she struck a solid stone wall, and then, like some living thing, sprang back, already again to batter down that which stopped her progress. The vessel quivered from stem to stern.

"What's that?" cried Nat, springing from his berth.

"I don't know," answered Jack, who was already out on the floor, holding onto the bolted-down table to keep his balance. Then through the darkness of the night, and above the roar of the wind, the swish of the waves and the patter of the rain, came the hoarse cry:

"All hands on deck! We've struck! All hands on deck!"

"The *Polly Ann* is wrecked!" cried Nat.

Jack said nothing, but began hastily pulling on what few clothes he had taken off. Nat followed his example.

"All hands on deck!"

Again the hoarse cry rang out.



"Man the boats! All hands man the boats!"

In spite of themselves a fit of trembling seized the two lads. It was a fearful thing to be awakened in the middle of the night to find the ship foundering. Quickly they finished dressing and left their stateroom.

"Come on deck!" called Jack to Nat.

Nat followed him. In the darkness of the passageway he collided with some one.

"Oh, we're sinking!" cried a voice they recognized as that of Jerry Chowden. "We'll be drowned!"

"You will be if you stay down here bawling like that!" cried Jack. "Get on deck!"

"All right, I will! Don't leave me! Please don't leave me, Jack! I'll be a friend of yours after this! Save me!"

"I don't want you for a friend, but come on!"

The bully, crying and whimpering, followed the two chums. As they were ascending the companionway there came another tremendous crash, followed by a sound of splintering and rending timbers. The poor *Polly Ann* quivered and trembled like a creature in agony.

Once more the cry rang out, and they knew it was the captain's voice:



“Man the boats! All hands on deck! Where are you, boys?”

“We’re coming!” answered Jack stoutly.  
“Here we are!”

Such a scene of confusion as met their eyes when they reached the deck! The fore- and the main-masts had gone by the board, and the wreckage hung over the side, pounding against the already exposed ribs of the wrecked ship. This much they saw in the dim glow from several storm lanterns that had been hung about when night fell. The decks were strewn with wreckage, and there was a curious look about the planks and slope of the deck that Jack could not at first account for. Then, as he looked again, he saw what caused it. The ship had almost broken in two, and was driven high up on some reef. Over the bow the waves were breaking, and, as the craft settled lower and lower into the cruel sea, the water washed farther aft.

“Lively now, my men!” cried the captain.  
“Are you all ready with that port boat?”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered Larson, the mate.

“Then lower away.”

“Lower away it is, sir,” replied the mate, as he gave the order to the men with him, and they began paying out the ropes that ran through the davit pulleys.



The wrecked ship gave a great lurch, as if she was going under,

"Lively, men! We haven't a minute to spare!" cried the captain.

"Lively it is, sir," answered the mate stolidly. Nothing, it seemed, could shake his iron nerve.

The boat dropped. Then, whether one of the men loosed his hold of the rope, or whether the lurching of the vessel caused the cables to foul was never known, but, at any rate, the bow of the small boat became loosed from the pulley hook, and dropped into the sea. A moment later a big wave arose alongside the ship, seized on the craft and fairly twisted it free from the other davit. The next moment it was dashed against the side of the schooner, and broken into kindling wood.

A groan went up from the crew, stout-hearted though they were. But the mate kept his head. Captain Reeger had gone below for a few of his possessions, the ship's papers, and chronometer.

"Lower the starboard boat, an' we must bane quick wit her," called the mate, in his broad Swedish tongue. Then something which is liable to happen whenever there is a shipwreck or a fire took place on the *Polly Ann*. There was a panic. The men knew, with the loss of one boat, there



would not be room for them all in the only remaining one.

"Hold on!" cried the captain, rushing on deck at that juncture. "What's the matter?"

"Port boat smashed," replied Jack.

"Well, there's room enough in the other, and my dinghy will hold three on a pinch. We'll all get off."

But the captain's words had no calming effect. The men were wild with fear. The mate tried to stop the rush, but could not. They fairly tore at the ropes, and, before any one could stop them, they had lowered the boat. Fortunately it was calmer on that side, as the schooner offered some protection against the wind and waves.

Several sailors leaped down into the boat. The mate, seeming to lose his head at the prospect of being left behind, followed.

"Push off!" he cried. "Push off!"

"Wait! Wait for us!" screamed several.

"Don't leave me behind!" yelled Jerry, making for the rail. "Don't leave me to drown!"

"Come back here!" shouted the captain. "You'll swamp the boat!"

But it was too late. Jerry, and several of the sailors had leaped. They missed the boat and splashed into the water.



"Come to my dinghy!" cried Captain Reeger to Jack and Nat, the only ones left.

They started toward it, but before they could reach it a tremendous wave lifted the small craft clear of the davit hooks, and dashed it against the stern of the schooner, smashing the frail boat as the other had been broken to bits.

A moment later there came a terrible grinding, rending sound. The *Polly Ann* seemed to lift herself up, as if making a brave effort to get clear of the cruel rocks that had impaled her. But it was utterly useless. The heaving waves only fixed her still firmer on the reef.

Then came a more violent tremor. The rending, grinding sound became louder. The deck seemed to be slipping away from under the feet of the boys.

"She's going to pieces!" cried the captain. "She's breaking up! She'll go down in another minute! Jump, lads! Jump!"

Jack and Nat needed no second bidding. They ran to the rail, followed by the captain. There was nothing now to be seen but a foam-crested waste of great waves, rising and falling. The small boat was out of sight. Whether it floated or had sunk with its living freight, they could not tell.

The *Polly Ann* settled lower and lower into



the sea. To remain longer meant to be engulfed in the whirlpool that would be created by the suction when she sank. To jump was their only hope, yet such a frail hope as it was!

Jack stood up on the rail, and Nat followed him. They gave one look behind them, at the ship which had been their prison, and from which they were now so strangely freed, and leaped into the sea. Captain Reeger followed them, and, a moment later they heard, above the howl of the wind, the final crash, as the timbers of the *Polly Ann* slid from the reef and were scattered upon the billows, while the heavier parts of the hulk sank beneath the bosom of the ocean.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### ADRIFT AT SEA

DOWN under the swirling waters plunged Jack Ranger. Nat followed him, and Captain Reeger, too, disappeared beneath the waves. But the three were good swimmers, and, handicapped though they were by wet clothing, and by the tumultuous billows, they managed to reach the surface, and struck out strongly.

"Nat! Nat! Where are you?" called Jack, as soon as he could get his breath.

"Here, Jack," replied his chum. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Let's keep together. Can you see the captain?"

"I'm here," shouted the commander of the late *Polly Ann*. "Over this way, boys. Keep clear of the wreck. You may get hit by a heavy timber."

Jack swam toward the sound of his companions' voices. As he buffeted the waves he felt his hand strike against something solid. He grasped it, and



found, when he had pulled himself up out of the water a little way, that it was a big piece of wreckage, which had been torn loose from the schooner. It was broad and nearly flat, and though it was low in the water, it formed a most excellent raft. Jack climbed up on it, and found it supported him comfortably, and would hold several more.

"Here!" he cried. "Over this way! I've got a raft!"

It was so dark he could see nothing, but to guide his companions he continued to shout, and presently, attracted by the sound of his voice, Nat and the captain reached the raft, and climbed up.

"Well — this — is — better — than — being — out — there — Jack," panted Nat, for he was exhausted from his battle with the waves.

"Yes, it's better than the boat," said the captain, as he sat down on the raft, and tried to peer through the darkness. "That craft will never reach shore, I'm afraid."

"Do you think we will?" asked Jack anxiously.

"Well, we're quite a way out, but this is a solid part of the ship, and it will hold together for a long time. We're likely to be washed off, though. Look out! Here comes a big wave!"

The boys just had time to grasp hold of projec-



tions on the pile of planks and timber, when they were deluged by a mass of water that poured down on them from a big wave which broke over the raft.

"Many more of them and we'll be done for," commented Nat. "That was fierce!"

They shook the water from their eyes, and caught their breaths. Once more the captain peered about.

"No sign of them," he murmured. He seemed to be listening, though to what, the boys could not tell. They could barely make out each others' forms.

"I believe the wind is dying out," said Captain Reeger at length. "Boys, the storm is passing. Thank God, for it has done its worst!"

There was no doubt about it; the wind was not nearly so strong as it had been, but they had failed to notice this in the excitement of leaping from the ship, and getting on the raft. But the gale no longer howled overhead. True, it blew some, but each gust was less strong than the preceding one. The sea, however, would not subside so quickly, for it had been deeply stirred, and the heaving billows tossed the raft, first towards the black heavens, and then down into the depths.

"If we can hold on until morning I think we'll



be safe," spoke the captain. "Hold fast, boys; here comes another wave!"

It came, but it was not quite so bad as the previous ones. Still Nat was nearly washed off, only Jack grabbed him in time.

"Thanks, Jack," was all Nat said, when he had recovered his breath, but he meant a great deal more than that.

Through the long night, they clung to the raft. Whither they drifted, they knew not. They were wet through, cold, hungry and thirsty, but they knew their only hope was that bit of wreckage adrift in the midst of the tumultuous sea.

How long the hours were! The darkness seemed as if it would never pass. Then, so gradually that they could hardly tell when it began, there appeared a faint grayness to the inky night that enfolded them.

"It's getting daylight," said the captain softly, and his voice startled the boys, so strange did it sound.

They tried to peer about them, to see where they were — how close to the reef on which the schooner had been wrecked — or to discern if the boat was in sight, but they could see only a veil of mist, which became more dense as the dawn came nearer.



"Fog!" exclaimed Captain Reeger. "There's going to be a heavy fog. There generally is up this way. We must be pretty near the fishing banks."

"But if there's a fog it will be calmer, won't it?" asked Nat.

"Yes, there's no wind now, but that makes it all the more dangerous. We may be run down by some steamer."

This was a new terror, and there was no way of averting it. The boys stared through the fog, that was now thick about them, as if, at any moment, the prow of some ocean liner might loom up above them, to cut them down.

"Maybe we could tear off some pieces of plank, and use them for oars," suggested Jack. "There are several loose boards. But which way shall we row?"

"Away from the sun, if we want to reach shore," answered the captain. "It's worth trying. See if you can get some planks loose."

The boys managed it, but the pieces proved clumsy oars even when they had been roughly whittled into shape with Captain Reeger's big knife. They managed to row with them, however, after some oarlocks had been improvised from pieces of wood forced into the cracks of the raft.



“Now for shore!” exclaimed Nat.

He and Jack rowed as well as they could, and, by noting a bit of floating seaweed they ascertained that they were making slow progress. But it would take them days to reach the shore at that rate, and they knew it.

“Pity we didn’t think to stock this part of the ship with food and water before we started,” said Jack with an uneasy laugh. He was beginning to be very thirsty, for he had swallowed some of the salty ocean water.

“I’m afraid we’ll have to stand it,” murmured the captain. “This fog may help us though. It’s getting thicker every minute. Take out your pocket handkerchiefs, boys, and spread them out. They’ll get saturated with the dampness, and you can squeeze out a few drops of water. I’ve known sailors to exist for days on that.”

The fog, indeed, was almost a rain, so heavy was it. All about them was a dense white blanket, through which they could not see more than a few feet. Soon three handkerchiefs were hung up on a rude framework of sticks, stuck in cracks on the raft. And anxiously did the survivors wait for them to become wet enough so that a little water, if only a few drops, might be had from them.



"I'm going to try mine!" exclaimed Nat at length. "I can't wait any longer."

He twisted his handkerchief in his hands, holding it above his mouth. A little stream of water trickled into his throat.

"My! But that's good!" he cried. "Only I wish it was a pailful."

The others followed his example, and felt much refreshed. Then they hung the linen squares up again. They were hungry and cold, but no one spoke of this. There was no use dwelling on their miseries.

Slowly they forced the clumsy raft along. All about them was silence — a white wall of silence. The waves had greatly subsided, and their raft floated better. They could sit down on it without being wet, except by the fog, which was fairly raining on them now.

"How many miles do you suppose it is to the shore?" asked Jack of the captain.

"About fifteen or twenty."

"It will take us two days at this rate," murmured Nat.

The captain nodded his head. He knew what it meant — that thirst and hunger must be endured all that time. Could they stand it?



"If we only get sight of the boat," began Jack, "we could —"

He did not finish. Instead he stopped and listened. Off to the left sounded a cry.

"Hark!" whispered Jack. He and Nat ceased rowing.

"Help! Help!" was the call.

"It's the boat! It's the boat!" shouted Nat, standing up.

"This way! This way!" yelled Jack. "All together now," he added, and they combined their voices into a cry to guide whoever had called.

Several anxious minutes passed. Then came the cry again.

"Help! Help! Will no one save me!"

"That's not the boat," remarked the captain gravely. "That's some one all alone. Over here!" he cried. "We're on a raft!"

They waited. Suddenly the fog seemed to lift a little. They dimly discerned a black object floating on the water.

"There it is!" cried Jack. "Row, Nat! Row!"

They dipped their clumsy oars into the water. The black object floated nearer to them. They saw that it was a piece of a mast, with some one



clinging to it. A little later they could see who it was. Looking over the top of the round piece of wood, to which he was clinging, Jerry Chowden stared at those on the raft.

"Save me!" he cried, and then he slipped off and disappeared.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE RESCUE

JACK RANGER plunged from the raft. His sudden leap made the frail craft, if such it may be called, careen to one side, and Nat and the captain nearly rolled off. But they caught themselves in time.

Anxiously they peered at the spot where Jerry had gone down. There was a commotion in the water, and, a moment later, Jack reappeared, holding Jerry, who seemed unconscious. Jack struck out for the raft, which, fortunately had not drifted beyond his sight in the fog.

"Give him a hand," directed the captain to Nat. "I'll get on the other side here, so the raft won't tip again."

They managed to get Jerry on board. A quick examination showed that he was breathing.

"He's only weak, I guess," said the captain.

Jerry opened his eyes.

"Water — water," he murmured.

Without a moment's hesitation Jack took his



own handkerchief from where it was hanging to collect the rain that was now descending, and squeezed the precious fluid between Jerry's lips.

"More," murmured the half-unconscious lad.

Nat handed over his handkerchief, and so did Captain Reeger, though they were both very thirsty. The fresh water revived Jerry, and he sat up.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Adrift somewhere on the Atlantic ocean, on part of what was the *Polly Ann*," replied Jack.

"What happened to you?" inquired Nat.

"I missed the boat when I tried to jump into it," explained Jerry, "and I grabbed hold of that piece of mast. I've been clinging to it ever since, though I was afraid the sharks or whales would get me."

"There are no sharks around here," said the captain, "and as for whales, they'd be more frightened of you than you could be of them."

"Is there anything to eat here?" asked Jerry in a whining tone. "I'm awfully hungry."

"So are we," replied Jack grimly, "but I guess you'll have to wait awhile. The cook's left," he added, with a touch of his old-time humor.

It was now quite light, but they could not make out the sun through the curtain of mist, nor could



they see more than a few feet in any direction. The sea was quite calm, and they could see bits of wood floating about them, which seemed to indicate that they were not far from the scene of the wreck.

"Why don't you row ashore and get something to eat?" asked Jerry, as he noted the oars the survivors made.

"We're tired," announced Nat shortly. "We've been rowing for quite awhile. When we heard you yell we thought it was from the boat."

"I was yelling a long time," whined Jerry. "I thought no one would ever hear me. When will we get to shore, Captain?"

"I don't know. Suppose you and I row a bit, Jerry? Nat and Jack have done their share."

"I'm too — too weak."

"You've got to help," said the commander sternly. "It isn't fair to have them do all the work. Come on, now, take hold of one of those oars."

Jerry was a strong, hulking fellow, but he disliked exertion of any kind. Still there was no help for it, and he had to take up the piece of board that served to propel the raft slowly.



"I'm thirsty," he said, when he had rowed a few strokes.

"The water tank isn't filled yet," announced Jack, "and when it is, it's our turn to drink. You had your share. Hang out your handkerchief, just as we do."

It was raining quite hard now, and the prospects for a fair supply of fresh water were better. Jerry extended his handkerchief on some sticks, and began to row again.

"If we only had some sort of a cask we could catch a supply of water, and have it when it stopped raining," said Nat.

"Look over there!" exclaimed the captain suddenly. "That looks like an empty biscuit tin from the wreck."

They looked where he pointed, and saw, bobbing up and down on the gentle swell, a large, square tin, such as biscuits and cakes come in. They headed the raft for it, and when they came close enough Jack hauled it aboard.

"There's something in it," he announced. "I hope it's something to eat."

"It hasn't been opened," added Nat.

Sure enough, the tin was sealed, there being strips of parafine paper around the edges of the cover. This had served to keep the water out,



and the tin, being air tight, had floated with its contents intact. An instant more and Jack, with the captain's knife, had opened the box.

"Crackers!" he cried. "It's full of crackers! We shan't starve now!"

"Pass me some," spoke Jerry eagerly.

"Hold on there," interrupted the captain. "I'll serve out this mess. Boys," he added solemnly, "there's no telling how long we may be on this raft. We'll have to be careful of our provisions. I think I'd better deal them out."

"That suits me," replied Jack, and Nat nodded an assent. Only Jerry looked glum, but no one minded him.

"I think I'll empty the box," the captain went on. "I'll put the crackers in a fairly dry place on the raft, and we can store some water in the box. What do you say?"

They agreed that this was the best plan, so the commander placed the crackers in a depression in the highest part of the raft, and covered them with pieces of board.

"They'll be a trifle damp, but that won't hurt them," he explained, "and we'll have a fine tin for water. Now I'll rig up a system to catch some."

He wedged the box on the raft and then, using the four pocket handkerchiefs, made a sort of



basin which served to catch the rain, which ran down the linen squares into the tin. Of course, there was not much water that got in, but even a little bit, the captain knew, would preserve life for a long time.

This much done, he passed around some of the crackers, and it is safe to say, that nothing the survivors of the wreck of the *Polly Ann* had ever eaten, tasted any better than those same crackers.

"Now we're in fairly good shape," announced the captain, as he again took up what passed for an oar, and directed Jerry to begin rowing.

All that day the fog wrapped them in its white mantle. Fortunately the rain kept up, and they managed to catch the tin full of water. They took turns at the oars, but whether they were approaching shore, or getting farther away, it was hard to tell. There was now nothing to indicate where the sun was, though in the early dawn, the light in the east, contrasted with the blackness of the west, had served as a guide. Now they had to "go it blind."

Night settled down — a black, hopeless night. A cold wind sprang up, and the sea became choppy. Still the big raft rode well, and there was not much danger. But their plight seemed very hopeless.



"We'd better not row any more," advised the captain. "Let's rest until morning. Then the fog may lift."

How they lived through the night they never could tell clearly afterward. It seemed like a terrible dream to them. But the hours passed, and once more they saw the light in the east. At the first glow the captain stood up, to stretch his cramped legs, and see if he could observe anything. He uttered a joyful exclamation.

"Boys!" he cried. "The fog is lifting. I can make out a shore line!"

The three lads sprang to their feet, all their weariness and hopelessness forgotten.

Yes, the fog was lifting. The light in the east grew, and assumed a golden glow. There were no fog clouds — no wreaths of vapor — to obscure it now. Then a bright yellow rim appeared, and grew in size. It tinted the dancing waves of the sea.

"The sun!" cried Jack. "There's the sun!"

Surely no ancient worshippers of the golden orb of day ever welcomed the sight of the luminary any more than did these on the raft.

Up it came, higher and higher, a golden ball of fire, warming them and filling their hearts with hope. Then they turned and looked to the west.



Yes, there was land plainly in sight, but what it was they could only guess.

"Row! Row!" cried Jack. "We'll soon be ashore!"

"It will take quite a while," spoke the captain. "Suppose we hoist a signal? I think we will be rescued sooner if we do."

They fastened their handkerchiefs and coats to the two planks that had served as oars, and stuck them upright in cracks in their raft.

"There," said the captain; "somebody will very likely see them. All along the coast there are life saving stations, and some beach patrol is sure to sight our signals before long. We'll watch for a boat."

Their fast diminishing crackers and water were served out, but they ate joyfully. The sun warmed them, and life now seemed worth living. But how anxiously did they watch for the sight of a small black speck, which would mean a boat putting off to them.

At last it came. At first it seemed no larger than a cask or barrel, but it grew in size until they made it out to be a small launch, coming toward them with all speed.

"We're rescued!" exclaimed Jack joyfully.

"Yes, our troubles are over," said the captain.



"I suppose you boys will be glad to get back home."

"Won't we, though!" cried Nat.

"Home!" said Jerry. "Are you going to let them go? Aren't you going to keep them for Lavine?"

"Well, I guess not!" exclaimed the captain wrathfully. "I'm done with Lavine for good and ever!"

"No, you're not!" cried Jerry angrily. "You must hold these boys, or I'll tell him you've let them go! He wants them held!"

"Then he'll have to come and hold us," said Jack grimly.

"I'll warn him how you've played him false, Captain Reeger," threatened the bully. "He'll fix you!"

"And I'll fix him!" cried Jack. "Now you let up on such talk, Jerry Chowden, or I'll pitch you overboard!" and Jack looked as if he meant it.

Jerry retreated to the extreme end of the raft. The others watched the approach of the boat. They could hear the puffing of the motor now, and caught sight of the life savers, in their white summer uniforms.



"Raft ahoy!" called the man in the bow of the boat. "Do you want to be rescued?"

"Do we?" cried Jack. "Well, I guess we do!"

And a little later the four survivors were in the motor craft, telling their experiences to the life savers, while the swift little boat was headed toward shore.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### CHOWDEN COMES TO GRIEF

THEY landed at a little town not far from Eastport, Maine, and there was quite a crowd of the villagers down at the beach to see them come in. For, as the captain had hoped, the signals on the raft had been seen by a beach patrol, and rumors of a wreck had quickly spread, while the life savers were getting ready to go out.

"Now come right with us, and we'll take care of you," said the captain of the life guards. "I expect you're good and hungry. And I reckon you want to send word to your folks."

"That's what we do, and some other messages besides," added Jack. "Is there a telegraph office here?"

"One right in town, but you want to eat and get dry first, don't you?"

"We're pretty dry," said Captain Reeger, "but some grub wouldn't go amiss; eh, boys?"

"No, indeed," replied Nat.

Jerry said nothing, but, at the mention of a tel-



telegraph office a strange look had come into his eyes.

"We'll have to watch out for him," said Jack in a low voice to Nat. "He means mischief. We mustn't let him get to the telegraph office first."

"Why, do you think he'd tell Lavine to come here and get us?"

"No, I'd like to see Lavine, Hemp Smith or any of that gang catch me now. What I want to do is to catch them. I want to wire dad to get after the rascals, but if Jerry gets ahead of us and warns them, they'll run away."

"That's so. I'll keep my eye on him. I don't think he'll do anything until he eats, if he's as hungry as I am."

The survivors were well taken care of by the life savers. How they did enjoy the meal prepared for them, after they had lived for nearly two days on crackers and water! Never had victuals tasted so good.

"Did you hear anything of a boat from the *Polly Ann* coming ashore?" asked Captain Reeger, of Captain Addison, who was in charge of the life saving station.

"Some boat came ashore yesterday, about ten



miles down the beach," was the reply. "I didn't hear any particulars though."

"I guess that was from my ship," commented Captain Reeger. "I hope the crew was all saved."

"You must have had a tough time," observed one of the guardsmen.

"We did," answered Captain Reeger, and he gave more details of the wreck.

Meanwhile Jack and Nat had been watching Jerry. They saw him edging his way toward the door, and, a little later, he went out. The life savers did not notice him, as they were busy listening to Captain Reeger's account of the wreck.

"Come on, Nat," said Jack quickly. "He's up to some mischief. We must stop him."

They hurried outside, just in time to see Jerry running at top speed toward the village, from which the life station was distant about a mile.

"After him!" cried Jack. "He mustn't be allowed to send any message to Lavine."

They took after Jerry. The bully heard them coming, and increased his speed. But he was no match for Jack and Nat, who were two of the best runners at Washington Hall. They soon overtook him.



"Where you going?" asked Jack.

"None of your business. Get out of my way, Jack Ranger," for Jack had planted himself in front of Jerry.

"Not if you're going to send a warning to Lavine!"

"What's that to you? I guess I can send him a message if I want to."

"No, you can't! For once in their lives Hemp Smith, Lavine and Company are going to get their deserts."

"You let me pass!" demanded Jerry.

"Not just now," retorted Jack, tantalizingly. "Nat, can you look after him, while I take a sprint, and settle the hash of that bunch of crooks?"

"Sure," replied Nat.

Jack started off on a trot toward the telegraph office, while Nat stood in front of Jerry to prevent him from following.

"You let me pass, or it'll be the worse for you," threatened the bully.

"It can't be much worse than I've gone through with in the last two weeks!" remarked Nat. "You're going to stay right here or else turn back to the station. You can't send any messages today, Jerry Chowden!"



"I can't, eh?"

"No, you can't!"

Jerry was not so much afraid of Nat as he was of Jack. He advanced, doubling up his fists, ready for a combat, and he was almost more than a match for Nat, who was not as strong as Jack.

"Are you going to let me pass?" demanded the bully once more.

"No, I'm not!"

"Then take that!"

He aimed a blow at Nat's head, but the latter was too quick for him, and stepped back. Jerry, however, followed him up, and succeeded in delivering a heavy fist in Nat's side. It took his breath.

Taking advantage of this, Jerry swung around and started off up the beach, toward the town. Nat recovered himself quickly and raced after him.

"Come back here!" he cried.

"Not much!" replied Jerry with a laugh.

"I'll warn Lavine now!"

Nat took after him. However much of a match Jerry was for Nat in a fistic battle, he could not out-run him. Nat caught the fleeing bully by his coat and pulled him back.

"Let go of me!" roared Jerry, swinging around



and aiming a savage blow at Nat. Jack's chum dodged, and, instinctively struck back.

How it happened he never could tell afterward, but his fist caught Jerry full on the chin with a sharp crack. Nat had put all his force into the blow, and it was an effective one.

Jerry's head snapped back and, a moment later, he toppled backward on the sand, unconscious. Nat had knocked him out cleanly, and scientifically. There was no danger of Jerry sending a message to Lavine right away.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE RASCALS CAUGHT — CONCLUSION

NAT was not a little frightened at what he had done. Jerry lay so quiet, and looked so pale, that his antagonist feared he had seriously hurt him. Then the memory of having seen boys like that at Washington Hall, after a fight, reassured Nat.

He ran down to the water's edge, and scooped up some of the salty liquid in his hands. This he dashed in Jerry's face. The bully opened his eyes.

"Where am I? — What happened?" he asked.

"I had to stop you from sending that message," explained Nat. "I — I didn't mean to hit you quite so hard."

"Yes, you did and I'll get square with you," threatened the bully, but he was whining.

He rose to his feet and staggered along the beach. Nat was ready for him, and, though he disliked fighting, he made up his mind he would prevent Jerry going to the telegraph office, if he had to knock him down again. But Jerry had no intentions of risking another contact with Nat's fist.



He turned the other way, and hastened down the beach, in the opposite direction from the village.

"I guess it's safe to let him go," mused Nat. "It's ten miles to the next town, and before he can get there Jack will have his message off. Guess I might as well go and tell him."

He found Jack coming back from the village.

"Did you send the telegram?" said Nat.

"Yes. What happened to Jerry?"

"Well, he concluded he didn't want to warn Lavine," was Nat's cool answer, but Jack made him go more into details.

"Good boy!" he exclaimed, when his chum had finished. "That's what he deserved. Well, I guess our troubles are about over."

"Do you think they'll catch those rascals?"

"I hope so. I wired dad to connect with Mr. Skidmore and see if he couldn't get trace of them somewhere. Captain Reeger said they would probably be somewhere around Sickonsonnett, as they expected to make another printing headquarters in that neighborhood, after we were out of the way."

"But I thought Lavine was going to meet the schooner somewhere along the coast, and take us off."



"Probably he was, but he isn't now. They may not nab Lavine and Hemp Smith at Sickonsonnett, but they'll get some of the gang, and make them tell where the others are."

"I don't know about that. Hemp Smith is a pretty slippery customer."

"Well, we've done the best we can, anyhow. I'll wager the folks will be glad to hear from us again. I sent a wire to your father and mother."

"That's good. Now let's go back to Captain Reeger."

They found the commander of the late *Polly Ann* rather anxious about them.

"Where's Jerry?" he asked.

"Vamoosed," replied Jack, and he told what had taken place. "How about starting for home, Captain?"

"Well, we can start, but I don't know how far we'll get. I haven't any money. Have you?"

"Very little. I found a water-soaked bill in one pocket and I used nearly all of that to send the telegrams with."

"That's too bad."

"Nat hasn't any money, either," went on Jack.

"It's gone down with the schooner, I expect."

"Now don't let lack of money worry you," in-



terposed Captain Addison, of the life saving station, overhearing some of the talk. "We'll lend you carfare home."

"Then we're all right," said Jack. "Come on, Captain."

"Where?"

"Home with us, to Denton, until this affair is all straightened out."

"I'm afraid your father and aunts won't be very glad to see the man who helped kidnap you and Nat."

"Oh, pshaw! Don't let that worry you. I've been in worse trouble than this. Come on."

"But Lavine may cause my arrest! Perhaps I'd better keep away from where he is likely to be."

"Nonsense! We'll fix Lavine."

A little later the three were on their way to Denton, which they reached safely that night, having managed to catch an express train.

To say that Mr. Ranger and the three aunts were glad to see Jack is putting it mildly, but their welcome, particularly that of the three elderly ladies, was so extravagant that I'm afraid you would think I was exaggerating if I described it exactly as it happened. Sufficient to say that they



laughed and cried by turns over him. And Nat's folks were just as glad to see him.

"Well, Dad, what about Hemp Smith and Company?" asked Jack, as soon as he could get his breath. "Did they get any of 'em?"

"Some," replied Mr. Ranger. "I wired at once to Mr. Skidmore, on getting your telegram, and he and the constables rounded up some of the gang. They didn't get Hemp or Lavine, but they expect to, as one of the men confessed as to their whereabouts. I think we'll have them all soon."

"What about Bony and Sam?"

Mr. Ranger told of the breaking up of camp, details of which had been given him by Budge Rankin. Mr. Ranger told how worried he and Jack's aunts were, until they got the telegram sent from Portsmouth. Mr. Ranger had searched for his son and Nat, but unsuccessfully.

"Of course we were worried after that, wondering where you were," he said, "as we couldn't imagine what had happened, except that you were in the power of the rascals.

"We're not done with them yet," said Jack. "Dad, I want you to help out Captain Reeger." And he explained about the difficulty the commander was in.



"I certainly will," declared Mr. Ranger heartily, and he took Captain Reeger to see Judge Bennett, the leading lawyer of Denton.

Jack's first act, after the excitement had subsided, was to telegraph Bony of the safe arrivals, and to ask how Sam's father was. In response he got messages from both his chums, the one from Sam stating that Mr. Chalmers was much better.

Two days later a message was received by Mr. Ranger from the police of Portsmouth. It stated that Hemp Smith and Jonas Lavine had been arrested there, and were being brought to Denton, where the other members of the gang were locked up.

Several charges were made against the rascals. The principal one was the making of counterfeit stock certificates and railroad bonds, and another was that of kidnapping Jack and Nat. In both of these the boys, as well as Captain Reeger, were witnesses. When Lavine heard that the former commander of the *Polly Ann* was to give evidence against him, he exclaimed:

"I'll soon make him sing a different tune. I'll have him in here with me when I tell my story."

"No, you'll not," announced Judge Bennett calmly, "for your poor tool, Shinebloom, con-



fessed that he and you committed the crime that was laid at the captain's door. You'd better not say anything about that, unless you want another charge made against you."

And Lavine was wise enough to keep silent. The trial was soon over and the entire crowd were sent to prison for long terms, with the exception of Hemp Smith, who turned state's evidence, and got off with a lighter sentence. Nick also received a short term.

As for the members of the crew of the *Polly Ann*, nearly all of them, including Jupe the colored cook, were saved, for the boat got safely ashore. None of them were prosecuted, as it appeared they were only innocent agents of Lavine. No charge was made against Captain Reeger, for his part in the kidnapping, and he and the boys became firm friends, for the captain was a different man when he found he was free from Lavine's persecution.

The incident of the exploding motor boat, and the meeting of Jerry, Lavine and the red-haired man in the meadow was explained at the trial. Lavine had printed some bogus bonds, and he and Jerry, who weakly consented to help Lavine, were taking them to Hemp Smith, who, disguised in a red wig, was to dispose of them to Lavine's agents in New York. The explosion was an acci-



dent, and made no difference in Lavine's plans, though it greatly puzzled the boys.

What became of Jerry Chowden Jack did not learn for some time, but he afterward heard that the bully went out west for a long stay, as he feared arrest should he remain near Denton. He had gone in with Lavine, because of his hatred of Jack, and had been a willing tool.

"Well," remarked Jack, when the excitement attendant upon the trials and convictions of the rascals was over, "what shall we do now?"

"Don't you want to take a rest?" asked his father. "I think you had a pretty strenuous time."

"Why, that was like a vacation — most of it," replied Jack. "Our camping outing was spoiled, but as there is more than a month before school opens, I think we'll try it again. Sam and Bony will be willing, I know. And so will Nat."

So they went camping, in the same place again, taking Budge along with them, and this time no unusual adventures occurred. They had a glorious outing, and no end of fun.

"Let's go off and see if we can find that cave again," proposed Jack, one warm August afternoon.



"Not for mine," replied Nat. "It's too full of painful memories."

"Well, wasn't it an adventure worth having?" asked Jack.

"Yes, it was fun — part of it — but I don't know that I want any more."

But the adventures of Jack and his chums were not yet at an end, as will be seen by those who care to hear about him in the next volume of this series, to be called, "Jack Ranger's Gun Club; Or, From Schoolroom to Camp and Trail."

"Juseeanywhales?" asked Budge, breaking the sudden silence that had settled down over the camp, when Nat had refused to go explore the cave.

"Whales? No," replied Jack. "But if you'll hand me my fishing pole, Budge, and be careful not to get that gum you're chewing stuck all over it, I'll go and try to catch a few porgies for supper. They're better eating than whales."

"Awright," answered Budge calmly, handing over the pole, and then he went to sleep, while Jack went fishing.

And here, for the present, we will take leave of Jack Ranger and his chums.







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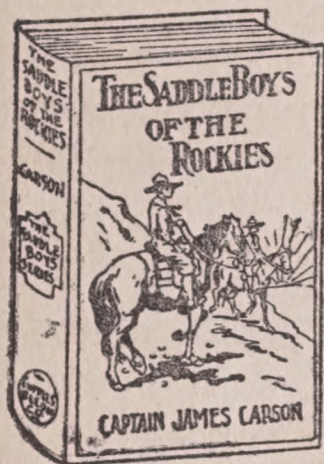


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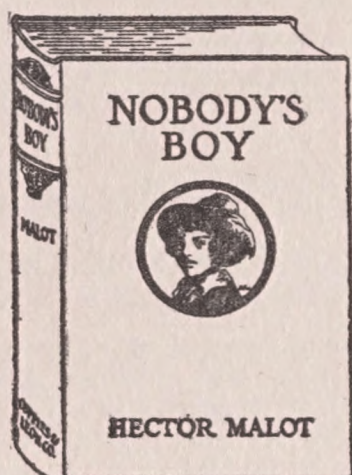
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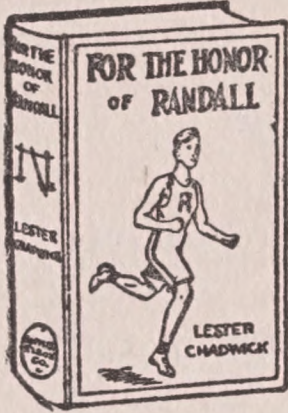


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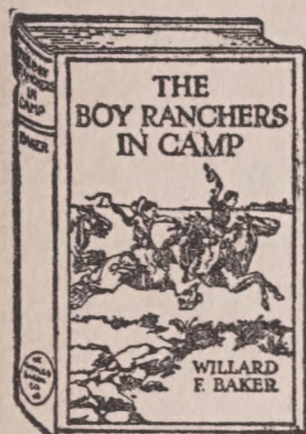
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